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**The Effects of Developing Metacognition  
to Bridge Phonics and Comprehension  
in Fourth Grade Struggling Readers**

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## **Abstract**

This qualitative research study documents the observed behaviors and reported experiences of fourth grade struggling reading students and their teacher when developing metacognition to bridge phonics and comprehension while increasing their motivation to read. Twenty-three fourth grade students participated in the study in a rural intermediate school containing approximately 1,200 students in the Northeastern United States. In this study, the teacher examined the process of employing metacognitive phonetic and comprehension strategies within authentic literature by meeting students at their independent reading level, providing book choice, using multisensory activities, modeling think alouds, and providing opportunities for self-reflection. During the study, the teacher took anecdotal notes, adjusting and applying reading strategies as needed by the students. The students wrote weekly in a reflective journal about their experiences. Methods of gathering data included teacher observation, artifacts, surveys, informal interviews, and student reflective journals. Methods of analysis included field log analysis, student interview analysis, reading attitude survey analysis, running record analysis, CORE Phonics Survey analysis, Reading Inventory Analysis, and codes and bins analysis. Students were taught specific strategies for monitoring their reading at a deeper level including: decoding, fluency, and comprehension. Students practiced decoding and analyzing words

within authentic literature when their meaning broke down. The teacher discovered that by meeting students where they are on the reading continuum, providing students with book choices, and guiding students to discover their own inner voice when they are reading positively influenced their reading experience. Findings suggest teachers must allow time for students to practice reading skills on their independent reading level with their book of choice. Independent practice builds background knowledge, strengthens reading skills, builds interest and confidence, motivates and increases stamina in reading. The creation of a personalized tool box of "fix-it" strategies allows students to reflect upon what to do when meaning breaks down in the future.

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## **Chapter 1: Researcher Stance**

My story ends somewhat the way it began, in a small group for struggling readers. Traveling back in time some thirty-nine years ago, I also sat in a Title I classroom struggling to read and trusting those who were trained to help me. Reflecting over the years, I remember being in the lowest reading group and the rocky road I had to travel to get where I am today. Unlike my beginning, my students' futures are bright and full of possibilities, in part, from the knowledge I have gleaned over the past twenty years of teaching.

Les Brown, a motivational speaker, spoke of teacher Leroy Washington. Mr. Washington was telling a student, "Don't let anyone fill your head with ideas about what you can or cannot achieve" (Washington in Delpit, p. 79).

To me, as once a struggling reader and now a teacher, this is a powerful quote. This was my reality all through my elementary, middle and high school years of my education. Teachers would not believe I was capable of doing the work. I was a C student who had to work really hard to get those grades. By the time I graduated from high school and prepared to go off to college, I had very little self-confidence. My guidance counselor tried to persuade me to go to a vocational school and insisted college was not for everyone, especially me. What kept me from giving up was my dad. He did not finish college because his parents told him he had to become a teacher like his brother and he did not want to be a teacher. He wanted to be an engineer. They refused to pay his tuition, so

he joined the Marines. Not only did the Marines train him, but they prepared him for a career in communications and he became an inventor for AT&T. From the time I was little until the day I graduated from high school, he expected me to go to college. He told me to pick the school and the major. He never doubted that I could do the work based on my SAT scores or grades. He knew how hard I worked and how determined I was so he had the wisdom and insight needed to see that I would be successful. My guidance counselor did not.

When I arrived at college, it was not easy. I changed majors three times before I found my niche. When I told my father I wanted to be a teacher, I was almost afraid. I knew what he thought of teachers. Fortunately, he shook his head in disbelief but then supported me all the way. To make a long story short, I graduated with honors and was offered a position as an assistant professor at Kutztown University. Being young, naïve and wanting to teach, I declined and began my career as an educator.

My own personal struggles to learn to read led me down a path of self-discovery. As a child I, I felt as though I could not do anything right in school, so once I reached high school, I ventured into the arts. By the end of high school, I had found my passions: my love for art, music and science. I approached college with two goals, one to become a doctor and another to minor in art. Well, if I had known then what I know now, I could have saved myself a great deal of time and aggravation, however, this was a journey of self-discovery so I learned the hard



way. I tried with all my might to keep up with the reading, taking notes, rereading, and flashcards, but the material was too dense for a struggling reader even at the college level. By the end of college, I had learned both how to study and to, read and write well, but in the process, the direction of my life changed. I was still going to help people, but in a different way. I knew I wanted to teach so I could help struggling students, like myself, make their way through school with more confidence and fewer scars.

Sixteen years and three children later, I made the greatest discovery of all. While I had become a teacher, I really did not know how to teach reading to younger children because I had taught fourth through sixth grade science.

It was not until my oldest daughter was in second grade and struggling to read that I realized I did not know what to do to help her. It was déjà vu. Every day after school, I worked with her to try to get her on grade level. I asked many people for advice, including her teachers, and finally someone suggested a learning center that used the Wilson Reading System. I immediately researched this program, found a center that offered the program, and enrolled my daughter. The learning center required that I observe how the teacher taught my daughter Wilson Reading, and then I had to follow through with the program at home. Using the Wilson Reading System to help my daughter learn to read became another defining moment in my career as a teacher.

At that time, I was on maternity leave, and not only did I have the time to help my daughter, but I also helped other children who were struggling with reading. After a year, the students I had been working with, including my daughter, showed huge gains in reading, but something was missing. The program suggests teaching phonics in isolation, so I began using take-home books from *Reading Street* by Hartcourt Brace with some of my younger students to help make the connection between the phonics skills and the reading in the text. As I reflected on my teaching and came to realize the depth of reading I realized I needed answers. It was then that I enrolled in a reading class at Moravian College. That was the third defining moment of my career. The amazing journey with my professor, Dr. Conard, and my text, Fountas and Pinnell, opened my eyes to the world of literacy. Simultaneously, I received writing training privately from professional authors. Not only was I vivaciously reading children's literature, but I was also writing it. The culmination of these events became the springboard for teaching children how to become stronger readers and writers. My quest to help struggling readers became a passion, and at the end of the course, I enrolled in the reading specialist program at Moravian College.

Last year, my professor, Dr. Shosh, provided an exemplary explanation of the research process. This course and research provided the opportunity for me to work as a Response to Intervention (RtII) interventionist. I had a group of fourth and fifth grade students who struggled with reading comprehension. At the end of

the year, the reading specialist and I realized that some of the students' difficulties centered on basic comprehension, while other students were also struggling with the basic elements of decoding.

The following year, I was offered a position teaching Title I Reading to fourth and fifth grade struggling readers with decoding difficulties. As my first year in a Title I Reading classroom, starting up a new program was full of challenges and required me to research and reflect on everything I was planning and teaching.

The Federal Government requires Title I programs to be research based. The research based program chosen by our district was Wilson's "Just Words". After teaching the program "Just Words" for a few months, I questioned if teaching the program alone was actually providing enough of the right kind of support for my students. The students were being taught decoding and vocabulary skills in isolation, but not how to apply those skills to every-day text. Would the intervention be as effective if I did not help my students make the connection between the decoding and comprehension within authentic literature? The other issue I noticed was the students lacked the motivation to want to learn how to become better readers. How was I going to help them if they didn't want to help themselves?

I did not want my students to fall victim to struggling through school the way I had. As a result of my quest for knowledge, passion for reading and

writing, and determination for all children to enjoy reading and writing as I do, I had to find a way to connect phonics skills taught in isolation to fluency and comprehension within authentic literature. Hence, the birth of my research question:

What are the observed behaviors and reported experiences of fourth grade struggling readers when they develop metacognition to bridge phonics and comprehension through the use of authentic literature? Secondly, how is this approach motivating to older students?

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

After fifty years of reading research, and two great debates, has the best approach to teaching children how to read ever been agreed upon? Had it simply been a matter of best practices, the debate could have been settled years ago (Baumann, Hoffman, Moon, & Duffy-Hester, 1998; Chall, 1976). Unfortunately, one of the determining factors of how educators should teach reading is political. One of the leading states in education reform is California. Our country's educators and politicians look to California for the next trend in education. Just as our country's political arena has disagreements between Democrats and Republicans, the educational arena has traditional and progressive educators as John Dewey explains in *Experience and Education* (1938). The debate is over more than whether to use phonics or whole language. It is over the ideals of traditional education versus progressive education (Anderson, 2000). With the Common Core rapidly approaching, this question has sent lawmakers, administrators, and educators scrambling for an answer. How do we teach intermediate struggling students with decoding deficits to read?

### **The Great Debate**

In 1976, Chall wrote *The Great Debate*, turning the world of reading research and instruction upside-down. She questioned the use of a code-emphasis method for teaching reading versus a meaning-emphasis method. Ten years later,

Chall (1976) revisited her study and described the two methods of teaching reading as either a decoding-emphasis instruction or a meaning-emphasis instruction. In the late 1960s and 1970s the research results Chall found described the process of learning to read as developmental. Chall found in her study, "The results of the school and laboratory experiments we analyzed as well as the clinical findings seemed to indicate that the first task in learning to read was learning the relation between sound and letters-decoding. The second task was reading for content and meaning"(Chall, 1976, pp. 3-4). Research of this era had suggested that explicit instruction in alphabetic code produced better reading results in elementary grades K-3 than the meaning-emphasis (Foorman, 1995; Chall, 1976; Perfetti, 1991).

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, the pendulum shifted and a new trend took hold of the world of reading: whole language. Alphabetic code-emphasis, later named phonics, had become taboo (Foorman, 1995). Phonics was replaced by whole language and politicians in education quickly named the disagreement over instruction the Next Great Debate. What they didn't mention was some of the key ingredients had changed. Chall (1976) had originally described coding-emphasis instruction as being a precursor to meaning-emphasis instruction. Whole language was meant to be a meaning-emphasis single theory program; however, it quickly changed into a program without any code-emphasis instruction replaced by whole word instruction. Politicians and publishing

companies quickly jumped on the bandwagon and began selling "whole language" as a single theory program that every child needed to know from the beginning of learning how to read (Chall, 1976). Phonics was thrown out of the proverbial window and whole language took the country by storm. Politicians who sided with whole language were predominantly democrats committed to progressive education (Anderson, 2000).

In 1997, Congress asked for a report from National Reading Panel on how to best teach reading to children (Anderson, 2000). The report sided with phonics instruction and indicated whole language alone was not enough. However, the report then states phonics should only be taught implicitly, not explicitly or systematically (Anderson, 2000). By 2000, phonics had proven to be the most effective instructional tool in teaching children early reading and spelling skills; however, whole language was not ruled out (Anderson, 2000).

### **What is Balanced Literacy?**

Educators argue Balanced Literacy is not another name for Whole Language. Pressley, Roehrig, Bogner, Raphael, and Dolezal, (2002) explain Balanced Literacy is made up of skills instruction and holistic reading and writing. The instruction is also geared toward the needs of individual students. In a classroom of balanced literacy, you would expect to see: skill oriented mini lessons; students immersed in books; writing; a teacher using time efficiently and

multitasking. The teacher sets high expectations for all students. Students who have difficulty with phonics are pulled out and sent to a program like Reading Recovery. The problem with balanced literacy, Pressley et al. (2002) points out, is there is very little research on the effectiveness of balanced literacy on older struggling students.

In a study completed by Manset-Williamson and Nelson (2005) they found by the time students reached the intermediate grades, not only did they have difficulty with comprehension, but also phonemic awareness and decoding. This gap grows each year with the student and how to instruct them becomes an issue (Manset-Williamson & Nelson, 2005). As a result of their study, Manset-Williamson and Nelson found that when teaching older, struggling readers how to read, it is better to use more explicit instruction.

The lack of a definitive answer over how to help older struggling readers leaves educators weary about trusting researchers, administrators, or publishing companies for fear of politics interfering with doing what is best for their students. At this time, educators need to question what methods should be used with students who have been through the system and continue to struggle year after year.

What do the teachers, who are down in the trenches, have to say about phonics instruction versus whole language? Teachers want balance (Baumann et al., 1998). They do not want to choose between phonics and whole language. "A



majority of teachers embrace a balanced, eclectic approach to elementary reading instruction, blending phonics and holistic principles and practices in compatible ways" (Baumann et al., 1998, p. 640).

**Balanced Literacy Depicted by Scarborough's Rope: How do we learn how to read?**

Hollis Scarborough, of Haskins Laboratories, is a senior scientist who has created the metaphor of a rope to explain the process of language acquisition in children (Scarborough, 2001, p. 98). The rope is broken into two areas, word recognition and language comprehension. The braiding and tightening of the rope depicts the gradual acquisition of reading over years of instruction and practice (Appendix A).

In her rope, word recognition is made up of phonological awareness, decoding and encoding, and sight word recognition. The three braid together and become more automatic with schooling and reading. This makes up the phonetic instruction necessary to learn how to read. The second area or strand is made up of language comprehension. This consists of background knowledge, vocabulary knowledge, language structures (syntax), verbal reasoning (metacognition), and literacy knowledge. This strand makes up the language comprehension necessary to comprehend text. When the two strands are braided and taught simultaneously, students are given the best opportunities to learn how to read. This is a balanced approach to learning how to read.

## **Challenges of Balanced Literacy: Breaking the Cycle of Older Struggling**

### **Readers**

Even with the demand from educators for a balanced approach to reading, the number of struggling readers continues to grow. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, "33% of elementary-aged students in the United States cannot read at even a Basic Level, and 66% cannot read at a Proficient Level. These statistics are essentially the same for older students; and of the 52% of fourth grade students living in conditions of poverty (i.e., those receiving subsidized lunch), 48% of them read below a Basic Level and 82% read below a Proficient Level" (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011).

According to Manning, Aliefendle, Chiarelli, Haas and Williams (2012) one of the most complex problems facing educators today is how to teach older struggling readers to read. Fourth grade proves to be a difficult and transitional year for students across the country. This is where the gap between readers and strugglers begins to grow rapidly. Researchers have proven this time and time again and deemed this epidemic "The Fourth Grade Slump." The epidemic has led to many theories being developed and research studies performed in a quest to find the best practices for helping struggling readers.

**The fourth grade slump.** According to Manning et al. (2012), one reason for students not reading is their lack of motivation. Currently, the only reason they are to read is to perform on high-stakes tests. Another reason students do not

enjoy reading is they are not given a choice of what to read; they are told what to read. Third, some students receive lower instructional quality as a result of the socioeconomic status of their community. Parents lacking financial means do not have the ability or means to help their children. Manning et al. set out to find out more about their problem and how to best help students. The last piece of research they found was alarming: "When struggling students reach the fourth grade it is nearly impossible to overcome the difference. Intervention at this time is only successful with 13% of students" (p. 13).

The conclusion of Manning et al. (2012) study yielded predictable results. The state and administrators are placing too much stress on test scores, test-taking strategies and the volume of skills taught and not allowing enough time for deeper thinking and problem-solving. Critical thinking can be attained through collaborative work, which teachers do not have time to utilize because of the vast curriculum they are expected to teach. Schools also need to allow time for Silent Sustained Reading. Manning also found that reading for fun is one of the best predictors of comprehension, vocabulary and reading speed. School may be the only place students will sit down and read a book.

**Lack of mastery of foundational skills in reading.** There are many reasons students struggle to read. Students who are not on grade level in phonics, fluency and comprehension by fourth grade are considered struggling readers. According to Boardman, Roberts, Vaughn, Wexler, Murray and Kosanovich

(2008) if the deficit is in phonics, struggling readers may have difficulty decoding multisyllabic words, difficulty using word attack strategies, or understanding where to find a syllable in a word. These students tend to sound out the first few letters and then guess at the rest of the word or skip the word all together. As a result, meaning is lost and the student does not understand what they have read.

Students struggling with fluency, according to Boardman et al. (2008), will tend to read slowly and with great difficulty, may not stop at punctuation, may fail to use phrasing, their voice may lack expression, may lack articulation of words, and will fail to meet grade level rate and accuracy for fluency. Students may even read robotically, stopping when they have to decode a more difficult word.

In order for fourth graders to continue to improve comprehension, they also need to have a strong understand of vocabulary. According to Boardman et al. (2008), struggling readers may have less exposure to new words, may lack awareness of the roots of words both written and oral, may lack experiences to create background knowledge, and may have a limited content-specific vocabulary.

Struggling readers will show evidence of misunderstanding of what they read. The reason could be one of many according to Boardman et al. (2008). The student may not be using metacognitive strategies as they read, may not realize when their comprehension breaks down, may not question while reading, may not

make connections with the text, may have difficulty navigating a non-fiction text, and may not set a purpose for reading. As a result the student may not realize the value of reading or may not enjoy reading for pleasure. "Students who leave first grade as poor readers were almost invariable poor readers by the end of fourth grade" (Campbell, Helf, & Cooke, 2008, p. 268).

**Short-term memory, working memory, phonological memory deficits.**

Another reason students struggle with reading may be from a deficit in their short-term/phonological memory. Moats and Tolman (2009) explain the brain has four sections dedicated to speech and language processing. Moats and Tolman (2009) refer to this part of the brain as the four-part processor. One of the sections is the phonological processor. This system allows us to perceive, remember, interpret, and produce the speech-sound system of the English language and learn other languages as well. The phonological processor also allows us to copy and mimic *prosody* when listening to reading. This also includes the rise and fall of the voice during phrasing (Moats & Tolman, 2009).

In a study by Swanson, Howard and Saez (2006), the authors describe working (phonological) memory by using the Baddeley's Model. This model describes working memory as a short term space that interacts with two other storage systems, the phonological loop and the visuospatial sketchpad. The phonological loop temporarily stores verbal information for a short period of time. The visual spatial sketchpad stores visual-spatial information for short periods of

time and is responsible for mental images. Working memory is like a computer with limited storage and holds information temporarily while it is processing other information. Short-term memory involves small amounts of information passively, like someone's phone number. The phonological loop is involved with the short term memory because it involves a speech-based phonological input store and a rehearsal process. This information is important because students having difficulty with phonics and decoding may have a short-term memory deficit.

Brady (1986) researched the impact of the short-term memory on a child's ability to read. She suspected a defect in the short-term memory caused phonetic coding difficulties. While researching, she discovered poor readers have difficulty with phonetic code, difficulty with verbal memory tasks, difficulty rhyming, and had greater transposition errors (Brady, 1986).

After completing her study, Brady (1986) then concluded short-term memory involves many processes and one or more of them could be the cause of the phonetic coding issue. In order to decode, Brady explains, first the child must have a visual representation and then phonetic representation of the sound or word. Then the child must remember the phonetic representation he created. Brady warns if there is a lack of practice, the representation may be forgotten. If the information cannot be retrieved from the child's memory, the phonetic

representation is lost. She concluded these results indicate the short-term memory is related to perceptual abilities.

One way to measure short-term memory is with digit span. As a child ages, their short-term memory increases its ability to retain digits. This growth is considered developmental and not learned. Digit span is a predictor of a child's ability to remember letters and sounds in their short-term memory so they can be transferred over to their long-term memory. This predicts how efficiently the short-term memory operates (Brady, 1986).

Brady's experiment examined the developmental link between the phonetic processes of encoding and articulation and verbal short-term memory capacity. She defines phonetic efficiency by a child's speed and accuracy of word repetition and repeated production of disyllabic tongue twisters. Brady found phonetic and memory tasks improved with age and a significant relationship between visual short-term memory and phonetic processing. Brady explains deficits in verbal short-term memory are related to phonetic coding (Brady, 1986).

In conclusion, Brady found verbal short-term memory deficits in poor readers. There is a correlation between phonetic skills and available storage space in the short-term memory. Students can be helped by providing memory games and tools and receiving extra teaching in decoding skills and encoding speed (Brady, 1986). If connecting words with images helps a child transfer a word from their short term to long term memory, then connecting meaning to those

images should help to transfer the information to the long term memory as well. This is why it is critical to teach phonics within authentic literature, rather than in isolation. Students need to make connections with the skill, word and context of the word to transfer the information from their short to long term memory.

In a study by Howes, Bigler, Burlingame and Lawson (2003) researchers studied the memory performance of students with Dyslexia. The purpose of the study was to find a model to explain dyslexia. In this study they found a phonological-core variable-difference model best explained dyslexia. This model includes developmental lags and serial memory impairments, and as a result phonological deficits (Howes, et al., 2003). Understanding why students have difficulty learning to read will help teachers provide the students with tools to compensate for their deficits. The use of multisensory phonics instruction with metacognition is one of those skills.

**Matthew effect.** The Matthew Effect is a term given to students who are trapped in a perpetual cycle of falling behind their peers throughout school (Campbell et al. 2008; Horner & Shwery, 2002). The cycle begins early on when students are learning how to read, yet fail to thrive. As a result, the student does not like to read, does not read and therefore misses out on learning new vocabulary. Campbell et al. (2008) found that students who were poor readers at the end of first grade are usually poor readers by the end of fourth grade (Campbell, 2008; Stanovich, 1982).



Scarborough (2003) researched the Matthew Effect on students with learning disabilities up through fourth grade and found just the opposite. She suggests it is possible that it is a short-lived phenomenon in early elementary years. Scarborough also notes that unless a student has been a victim to the Matthew Effect early on in school, the student will not suddenly fall in to the effect as an older student (Scarborough, 2003). This is important because it proves that interventions can help improve the reading of struggling readers.

Educators need to look at student growth and achievement. If a student does not show growth or achievement, then a change in their instruction is probably necessary. Repeating the same instruction will result in continued failure.

**Lack of motivation.** Applegate and Applegate (2010) were curious about the link between motivation and achievement. They also wondered if there was a link between higher levels of comprehension and motivation and questioned if interest level prompted deeper thinking about a text and if it was related to the motivation to read. Applegate and Applegate warn scripted programs, memorization of details, and low state standards has led to lack of motivation to read and less proficient readers. Their most important finding was the link between the text and the experiences of the person reading it as well their motivation to read based on gender. Applegate and Applegate concluded, “In terms of total motivation, value ascribed to reading, and self-efficacy as a reader,

children with high inclination to respond thoughtfully to text were significantly more motivated to read than children who excelled only in text-based comprehension” (Applegate & Applegate, 2010, pp. 226-234).

Giess, Rivers, Kennedy, and Lombardino (2012) also warn student motivation and attitude play a role in learning to read. In addition, many published materials for struggling readers are too childlike. The materials need to be age appropriate and interesting to get students to want to read. This is why authentic literature and leveled readers are so important to use during instruction.

**Self-efficacy.** Bandura (as cited in Horner and Shwery, 2002, p. 1) explains self-efficacy refers to "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations. Efficacy beliefs influence how people think, feel, motivate themselves, and act." Without self-efficacy, students cannot be motivated to read. Understanding self-efficacy is understanding what motivates humans.

The self-efficacy theory explains why students gain information to judge from their school work and accomplishments by observing their peers. The efficacy of each student is displayed in the work or accomplishments they produce. Success raises a student's efficacy and failure lowers it. Once a student has a strong sense of efficacy, one failure will not affect his overall efficacy (Schunk, 1991). Struggling readers do not have a strong sense of efficacy and struggle not only with reading, but their self-esteem.

Students can attain competence from their peers. By observing peers perform a task students can decide whether they can do the task themselves without risking a failure. Encouragement from peers, teachers and parents also encourages students to take a risk. Success and efficacy when attained in this manner is only temporary until the task is accomplished and internalized. Students will show symptoms of lacking efficacy in the form of anxiety (Schunk, 1991). Struggling readers often face anxiety when faced with a difficult book to read.

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### **Metacognition: Bridging the Gap between Phonics and Comprehension for Older Struggling Readers.**

Metacognitive monitoring emerged in the educational field in the 1970s when a researcher by the name of John Flavell coined the term metacognition (Flavell, 2004). John Flavell explains metacognitive monitoring is a developmental process of how one monitors or thinks about one’s own thinking. Flavell explains metacognition is made up of four key areas: metacognitive knowledge, metacognitive experience, goals, and the activation of strategies.

Flavell explains a person's metacognitive skills begin to grow or decline through the interaction with these four components, especially metacognitive experiences (Flavell, 2004). Verbal reasoning can be divided into two categories in reading, metacognition and decoding and metacognition and comprehension.

### **Metacognition and decoding.**

Metacognition and decoding was researched and reported by Bruce and Robinson (1999). Their report tells of three studies designed to assess the effectiveness of a metacognitive approach to teaching word identification and reading comprehension skills to older primary poor readers. Participants were taught Clever Kid's Cues, compare with known words, Carve up the word parts, context clues and asking the question, Does it make sense? Bruce and Robinson concluded that a combination of metacognitive word identification strategies and reciprocal teaching of comprehension was clearly more effective than reciprocal teaching of comprehension with traditional methods of word identification when teaching struggling readers.

In a study by Gaskins, Downer, Anderson, Cunningham, Gaskins, and Schommer (1988) they found poor readers cannot decode words quickly and accurately. As a result they designed a program to teach struggling readers using a multisensory approach, with focus on vocabulary and language development using a direct teaching model. Students learned how to decode words, compare and contrast words, and to be flexible when pronouncing words. Students also

had to have automaticity when decoding unknown words. This pilot program became known as a metacognitive program after researchers observed teachers placing an emphasis on awareness and control, which are two metacognitive strategies. By adding self-regulation, the pilot program became one of metacognition and phonics. In the end, Gaskins et al. (1988) found the program used with a trade book or basal reader was successful.

### **Metacognition and comprehension.**

Metacognition can also appear in the form of self-regulating when reading. Horner and Shwery (2002) explain that the processes of self-regulation, personal beliefs, and motivation are all interrelated and reciprocal. Students' self-efficacy beliefs affect achievement and their level of self-regulation. According to Horner and Shwery, another factor that affects self-regulation is task value. This means the purpose the student has for doing the activity. If a student is doing an assignment because he has to, then there is little to no buy-in or caring. The last factor affecting self-regulation is motivation. Motivation is made up of two types of goal setting: learning-oriented goals, and performance-oriented goals. Learning oriented goals are determined by how much the student wants to learn the task. Performance oriented goals are determined by how motivated the students are to look good and perform well. Assisting struggling readers with goal setting that is attainable increases self-efficacy.

"Poor readers tend to focus on a handful of strategies they use regardless of the particular reading situation. They have difficulties monitoring whether these strategies are working; therefore, they can persist in using a strategy that is not effective for a particular situation. This can cause them to become discouraged and give up, decreasing their self-efficacy and motivation to read" (Horner & Shwery, 2002, p.102).

Horner and Shwery (2002) also explain fluent readers self-regulate and know what strategies to use. They consider self-regulation processes, personal beliefs and motivation to be all interconnected (Horner and Shwery, 2002). The difficulty in using self-regulation in the classroom is thinking is performed in the student's head, not aloud. This is why 'think alouds' and modeling thinking is so important. It is also critical for the students to share how they are thinking with the teacher and their peers. Horner and Shwery suggest the following activities to improve self-regulation during reading: modeling, explain their thinking, coaching, scaffolding, articulation, and self-evaluation in the form of reflection or exploration. Students who are self-regulated readers set goals, monitor their reading, and reflect on their progress.

**Multisensory Phonics.** According to Campbell and Cooke (2008), fourth graders caught in 'the slump' or who are treatment resisters need multisensory phonics instruction. Multisensory phonics refers to visual, auditory and kinesthetic-tactile strategies to boost memory and learning. Based on their

research, they found teaching children how to manipulate phonemes in words is helpful to students across many grades, not just early elementary children. Their research shows once decoding skills are mastered, reading improves.

Multisensory phonics instruction was designed to help treatment resisters who are typically older children; Campbell and Cooke (2008) suggest forming small groups with other children with similar needs. Then they suggest using phonemic awareness and phonetic activities, give students more time to read, and provide students with explicit, systematic phonics instruction.

To carry out their study, Campbell and Cooke (2008) broke their intervention study into subgroups. Each subgroup had to demonstrate 5 data points and an upward trend before another subgroup was started. They used the following interventions: letter-sound correspondences activities, segmenting activities, word reading, and student reads orally from a connected text. The multisensory pieces to this intervention are: students say the words and then form each letter of the word on a carpet square; students tap out individual sounds to spell or decode a word or use magnetic letters on a board to find the letters creating the sounds; student taps out word after it is written to make sure they spelled what they heard; and students tap out unknown words in storybooks as they read orally.

According to Campbell and Cooke, (2008) in order for students to move into the maintenance stage of the explicit, systematic phonics intervention, was

they had to read 25 nonsense words per minute. The multisensory piece of the intervention is stopped once a student reaches this stage. Students are allowed to use sensory materials, but it is without instruction. Carpet squares would be unavailable during letter-sound correspondence and magnetic letters would be unavailable during segmenting. In conclusion, Campbell and Cooke found oral reading fluency on grade-level passages increased with multisensory instruction. By using multisensory phonics in conjunction with authentic literature, students are able to transfer the skill from their short term memory to their long term memory.

### **Benefits of a Metacognitive Approach to Phonics and Comprehension**

Gaskins et al. (1988) studied decoding and linguistics and a four-year cycle of program development. The result was a new program designed to teach struggling readers with average to above average intelligence. The program ranged from grade one to grade eight with a multisensory approach to teaching phonics. It consisted of game-like explicit instructions and emphasis was placed on a gradual release of responsibility from teacher to student.

According to Gaskins et al. (1988) using phonics, students can only get close to the sound of the word, but not say it exactly. At the intermediate age, most words are multisyllabic and more difficult to sound out. Struggling readers tend to miss clues about sound-symbol relationships and need to be shown explicitly what to do. They found, good readers could compare words and



patterns and figure out how to decode a new word based on their background knowledge of decoding. This is referred to as an analogy or compare/contrast approach to learning how to read. Struggling readers cannot be this flexible and transfer the skill from one word to another. Students must have phonemic awareness, segmenting skills, and possess a solid base of background knowledge (Gaskins et al, 1988). Supplementing a regular classroom reading program with additional support in decoding with metacognition has been proven effective. By using authentic literature and self-regulation, students will be able to sustain and transfer the decoding skills within real life reading experiences; hence bridging the gap between phonics and comprehension (Zimmerman, 1995).

### **What does Metacognitive Multisensory Phonics and Comprehension Instruction look like in the Classroom?**

#### **Get to know your students.**

##### *Assessments.*

Teachers need to take inventory of their students' strengths and weaknesses in reading at the beginning and throughout the year. According to Speece, Ritchey, Silverman, Schatschneider, Walker, and Andrusik (2010) teachers should use the three factor model to determine if their student is at-risk or not at-risk. The three factor model consists of word recognition and decoding, fluency and reading comprehension. Some students may even require teachers to look back even further to the development of their phonemic awareness. Speece et

al. (2010) suggest the use of universal screeners that expand beyond the second grade. They also warn that screeners should be multivariate and measure comprehension, word recognition and decoding (Speece et al., 2010).

Speece et al. (2010) found the stages of reading were more specific: word accuracy and decoding skills, word and pseudo word fluency, and reflection of comprehension of connected text. Other studies leave out fluency, which is a key component of helping struggling older readers. By using screeners, teachers can figure out where their students are having difficulty and then focus on strengthening that one area. There should be a minimum of three assessments performed in each of these areas. Some suggested screeners for fluency are running record, DIBELS or Aims web; for comprehension, MAZE or DAZE; for decoding, Colorado Decoding; TOWRE Phonemic Decoding Efficiency; Woodcock Johnson III auditory memory, word attack, and identification; Test of Silent Word Reading Fluency; RAN Letters for rapid recall of letters and sounds, and the CTOPP. Speece et al. (2010) also suggest using a teacher rating of reading problems. They warn educators to not be misled by year to year growth. Progress monitoring over time using a Running Record and reading inventory will give a better representation of a student's growth.

*Reading Attitude Survey.* Reading requires students to be interested in what they are reading. Most readers read because they are drawn to a book, somewhat of an emotional pull. Non readers do not read because they have not

had a positive experience with a book. With No Child Left Behind and Common Core on the forefront in education, students' attitudes about reading matter. In the past, researchers spent much time investigating comprehension while attitudes about reading took a back seat. As a result, McKenna and Kear (1990) developed a tool to measure students' attitudes about reading. Their interest began with previous tools to measure reading attitude; however, they fell short of being informative. They have created the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey, otherwise known as the Garfield Survey. The survey was created to provide teachers with a tool to measure their students' attitudes about reading at home and in school. Teachers can then plan positive reading experiences for their students to increase their time spent reading.

*Goal Setting.* According to Shunk & Zimmerman (as cited in Horner and Shwery, 2002, p. 104) "Goals motivate students to exert extra effort and persistence, focus on relevant task features, and use strategies that will help them learn" (Horner and Shwery, 2002, p. 104). Students need to have purpose for reading. The reason could be external or internal, depending upon what the student is reading. It is better for students to make short, achievable goals rather than long difficult to achieve goals. Horner and Shwery explain there are many different types of books to read as well. Struggling readers tend to not understand the differences between the books and how to set goals. The students need to be

shown the differences between the books and how to set goals for each type of book.

**Meeting Student where they are in their reading development.**

*Authentic literature.* Authentic literature is a piece written by an author, not a contrived basal reader teaching a specific skill or spelling pattern. Authentic literature activities get students excited about reading, provide practice, as well as get them up and moving. Finding a student's independent and instructional reading level is important to the student's success. Independent reading levels can be found through assessments such as a running record or reading inventory. Once the level is identified, the student can select reading material at their level. Applegate and Applegate (2010) consider the use of authentic literature to be motivational. Motivating struggling readers is necessary to get them to read.

*Leveled readers.* Another type of reading material is a leveled reader. "A leveled set is a collection of books in which processing demands have been categorized along a continuum from easiest to hardest books" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006) Students need to learn how to select a book on their independent reading level. Leveled reading materials include take-home books and authentic literature books. They offer students a choice in what they read and meet students where they are in their reading development. Another benefit from leveled reading books is they build background knowledge, teach a specific skill set, contain high interest stories, and build self-confidence. Fountas and Pinnell warn if students

read above their independent or instructional level the books will be too difficult and may be inappropriate. By reading a variety of genres, plots, authors, fiction and nonfiction, students can expand their reading and build their background knowledge (Fountas and Pinnell, 2006).

*In the Zone.* "The zone of proximal development defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in the embryonic state. These functions could be termed the "bud" or "flower" of development rather than the "fruits" of development." (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). In other words, with scaffolding, students would be capable of learning the concept being taught. Many students in fourth grade score at a third grade reading level. Because there is teacher support and scaffolding, the student can be taught reading at a fourth grade level. This is similar to a child's independent reading level versus his instructional reading level. His instructional reading level is usually a year higher than his independent reading level. A frustration level would be out of the child's Zone of Proximal Development.

### **Taking Phonics to the Next Level.**

*Phonics instruction with metacognition.* Phonics instruction with metacognition refers to the use of reasoning to decode a word. In a study by Bruce and Robinson (1999) students were trained to look at the context of a word, compare the word with other known words, and break the word into parts.

Students were assessed in areas of word identification, metacognitive awareness and monitoring of word identification cues, and comprehension. Bruce and Robinson, (1999) concluded " metacognitive instruction in word identification strategies was also found to be more likely than traditional methods of words identification to promote improved metacognitive skills in word identification" ( p. 23).

Metacognition forces students to think about the sounds a letter makes in a word they are reading as well as look at clues around the word to help them derive the word and its meaning. This is effective to use with older struggling readers because, according to Piaget as cited in Lutz and Huitt, 2004, they are cognitively ready to think about their thinking by the age of 9 years old. Piaget refers to this stage of cognitive development as concrete operational. In this stage of development, a child can demonstrate logically integrated thought (p. 4). Intelligence is based on logical and systematic manipulation of concrete objects and related symbols. The child can engage in reversible mental operations. Egocentric thinking declines. His or her development is limited to the application of knowledge to concrete objects and stimuli (Lutz and Huitt, 2004, p. 4). This stage spans from seven to eleven years of age. Eylon and Lynn (as cited in Lutz and Huitt, p. 4) remind educators that physical maturity does not automatically place a child in the next stage of development. Children all mature at different rates, so these ages are estimates.

*Multisensory Phonics.* The multisensory component of phonics is a combination of visual, auditory and hands-on activities used to explicitly teach phonics in an orderly way within authentic literature and not in isolation. In a study by Giess et al. (2012), multisensory strategies included tapping out vowel sounds and saying the sound aloud, touching each letter tile and saying the sound aloud, finger-spelling words and saying the sounds aloud, and visualizing the grapheme form of sight words. Giess concluded the use of multisensory explicit phonics strategies proved to be effective in improving the word recognition and spelling abilities of struggling older readers. They also note this was designed as an intervention, not a regular classroom reading program. Using vocabulary from authentic literature rather than random words makes the experience more meaningful to the students.

**Fluency.**

In a report by Hudson, Lane and Pullen (2005) the authors explain fluency is made up of three parts: accuracy, rate and prosody. Rasinski, Homan and Biggs (2009) warn, in light of DIBELS sweeping the nation, too much emphasis has been placed on accuracy and rate, while enough emphasis has not been placed on prosody. Prosody is expression, which allows the reader to have a deeper understanding of what is being read. Fluency in the classroom should be engaging and motivating.

*Reader's theater.* According to Young and Rasinski (2009), fluency and oral reading go hand in hand. Students who read fluently orally usually have good comprehension. Students who do not read fluently tend to have poor comprehension. The term associated with reading fluently is automaticity. Sounds need to come automatically for a student to read fluently. In attempts to create fluent readers, many educators and publishing companies created word callers with little comprehension. Prosody was not considered, just how fast the students could read per minute. With a new lens, educators are now realizing this mistake. Reader's Theater allows for repeated reading at deeper level of understanding and comprehension and does not produce word callers.

*Repeated reading.* Fluency is reading at a normal speaking pace while comprehending what is being read. Faver (2008) explains that nonfluent readers struggle to decode what they are reading and lose the comprehension of the text in the process. Repeated reading is a technique used to help students build fluency. Repeated reading should be developed as a class or community project. Students can read with the teacher, associate, volunteer, or peer. It is important to pair the struggling student with a fluent peer. Texts for repeated reading can include poetry, short passages in fiction or nonfiction, and leveled readers. This teacher chose poetry to use in her classroom. The poem is read at the beginning of the week by the teacher, then chorally by the class. The teacher then releases the responsibility to the students. Finally, the students break into their poetry partner



groups. They practice these ten to fifteen minutes per day. Students perform poetry for their class and also for their school. Partners are changed every nine weeks or so. A culminating activity can be a coffee house café to read favorite past poems. The end result is a boost in student confidence and excitement about reading while improving fluency at the same time. The students love to perform for their class as well as their school. This activity can also be used with fiction or nonfiction books read to therapy dogs. It is highly motivational and gets kids reading.

*Partner reading.* According to Marr and Dugan (2007), fluent reading is a reader's control over the words they read. Even though it has been around for years, fluency is now regaining popularity as one of the stronger indicators of a student's success in reading. This article examines some of the techniques educators can use to accelerate fluency development for struggling readers. The model presented in this article is called the Fluency Coach. The model incorporates: (a) modeling fluent reading for the student, (b) providing support or feedback when needed, (c) providing opportunities for students to read a text more than once, (d) charting student progress, and (e) identifying a benchmark or target the student need to reach with each reading. Leveled readers were created with the use of Fountas and Pinnell's guidance. Next, the teacher needs to select targeted students. Third, the teacher needs to select coaches and create explicit directions for the student coaches. Students scoring above Oral Reading Fluency

(ORF) word and non-word levels were invited to become coaches. Then the teacher must create mini lessons to model fluency and how to work through the list of directions.

*Echo reading.* Echo reading is performed when a fluent reader reads a sentence or a paragraph with prosody (fluent with expression and intonation). Then the student reads the same sentence or paragraph and tries to copy the fluent reader's prosodic voice. "Children can imitate a variety of actions that go well beyond the limits of their won capabilities. Using imitation, children are capable of doing much more in collective activity or under the guidance of adults (Vygotsky, 1978, p.88). What Vygotsky is saying is by using imitation we can get our students to do more than they would be able to do independently. Vygotsky stresses the importance of meeting our students at their level of development. We can assist our students in their development by modeling our thinking and having our students imitate what good readers do when they are reading. Then we gradually release the responsibility of the thinking over to our students.

### **Motivation.**

*Therapy Dogs.* One important piece to the puzzle of helping to improve reading skills in children is motivation. Struggling readers tend to feel more negatively about school, have a low self-esteem. As a result, their confidence and motivation was lower (Lenihan, McCobb, Freeman, & Diurba, 2010). In a study

carried out by the Cumming School of Veterinary Medicine and Lenihan et al, researchers studied the impact of struggling readers reading to therapy dogs. The study, Reading Education Assistance Dogs (R.E.A.D.) Program, was carried out over a five week period in the summer. The participants were 18 children entering second grade with similar reading abilities. There was a control group, who read to a human, and the research group, who read to a dog. Their findings were inconclusive. However, they did find the students who read to the dog did not drop out of the program, whereas the three of the students who read to the adult dropped out of the program. Lenihan et al. urged further study and felt the dogs were motivational. Other informal studies have shown improvement in motivation and fluency.

*Classroom Rewards.* Guthrie, McRae, and Klauda report US fourth graders are ranked 32nd out of 35 countries in the world for lack of motivation in reading. They also found intrinsic motivation for reading predicts a student's success in reading (Guthrie, McRae, and Klauda, 2007). For this reason, teachers should provide students with some way of earning classroom rewards for reading. Initially, the reward is extrinsic; however, as the students gain confidence in their reading and want to read more, it becomes intrinsic.

*Choice.* In an article by Guthrie, McRae and Klauda (2007) they report giving students choices during class, such as the topic under discussion, book choice, partners, and sequence of work improves their motivation. Guthrie,

McRae, and Klauda also caution not to allow too much choice. This could become confusing to the students. It is critical for struggling readers to have choices of books to read. Assigning a book to a struggling reader will not motivate the student.

*Reader's Theater.* Young and Rasinski (2009) changed the way fluency was taught and motivated students to love reading, performing and to become fluent readers. The participants were second grade students, 8 girls and 21 boys. The students were assessed with DRA and the Texas primary Reading Inventory. The program was divided into: before, during, and after reading activities, and ran on a five day cycle. On Fridays, it was Fluency Day. The students were grouped in four groups of 3 to 6 students. Students were exposed to a wide range of genres and texts. Struggling readers looked forward to Fluency Friday. The positive effects were both qualitative and quantitative. Reading comprehension improved while students were engaged and motivated to read.

Peebles (2007) found that movement through Reader's Theater also motivated struggling readers. In order for struggling readers to improve their fluency, they need to practice through repeated readings. Using Reader's Theater keeps students actively engaged, practicing fluency, and getting into character, which promotes deeper levels of thinking.

### **Metacognition and Comprehension with Authentic Literature.**

In the classroom, metacognition and comprehension involve thinking about your thinking. Students need to regulate what is being read while using comprehension skills. Comprehension skills include visualizing, asking questions, making connections, making inferences, drawing conclusions and summarizing. This process requires the teacher to explicitly explain each of the strategies.

### **Modeling.**

*Think Aloud.* According to Horner and Shwery (2002) reading is an internal process. Teachers need to model their thought processes to explain to their students what they should think in their heads. They also suggest teachers select a specific strategy to explicitly teach, explain why it was chosen, set goals for using the strategy, and evaluate their use of the strategy. Teachers should also include their personal thoughts and what motivates them when using the strategy. After students have had opportunities to observe and practice a few think alouds, then the tables should be turned and the students should have to follow the same procedure for the think aloud. Scaffolding should be used as needed. When students share their thinking, they can learn strategies from each other.

*Interactive read aloud.* According to Fountas and Pinnell (2006) an interactive read aloud is a book read aloud to help student learn the interactive skills they will need to discuss a book (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006). A read aloud also motivates students to want to read and models what a good reader sounds

like. Kindle (2009) suggests some of the following effective practices to use to develop vocabulary during a read-aloud. It is best to focus on Tier 2 words when reading aloud, and to save Tier 3 words for content area instruction. During the read-aloud, word learning can occur from just hearing the word and its use in the context of the sentence and when the teacher stops to elaborate. Many decisions had to be made throughout the read-aloud process, however, one difference among the teachers was the way they varied their use of incidental exposure, embedded instruction, and focused instruction when teaching vocabulary. Educators also used different instructional strategies. Differences in read-aloud practice impacts word learning. Care must be taken when implementing read alouds school-wide or district-wide because of this. The read aloud is an effective tool for teaching vocabulary and comprehension strategies (Kindle, 2009).

*Coaching.* According to Horner and Shwery, by observing students while they read and offering suggestions for strategies and reminding them to use the new strategies, teachers are coaching their students. It is similar to a football coach running through the play and having the player repeat it back and then practice it with his teammates. Encouragement, feedback, and reminders keep the student positive and moving forward (Horner and Shwery, 2002).

*Scaffolding.* Scaffolding is extra support added when a new skill in a subject is taught. As the student acquires the skill, the scaffolding is gradually pulled away. Support can be verbal or physical.

### *Self-evaluation.*

Horner and Shwery (2002) explain self-evaluation involves many processes. Students must monitor their progress toward their goal. Once the students reach their goal, they must create a new goal. Students reward themselves in some way if they reach their goals. If they do not reach their goals, they must figure out why they did not reach the goal. Some students may need scaffolding at first when learning how to set goals and monitor the goals (Horner & Shwery, 2002).

### *Reflection Journals.*

Reflection helps students develop self-regulation. Students compare their own goals and strategies to those of proficient readers. Once established, students have their own internal monitor for what good readers do when they read. Reflecting on the strategies used in reading helps students develop a better understanding of what to do during reading (Horner & Shwery, 2002).

**Family Involvement.** "True generosity consists precisely in fighting to destroy the causes which nourish false charity. False charity constrains the fearful and subdued, the "reject of life," to extend their trembling hands. True generosity lies in the striving so that these hands- whether of individuals or entire peoples- need be extended less and less in supplication, so that more and more they become human hands which work and, working, transforms the world" (Freire, 1970, p. 45). As educators, we need to reflect upon the assistance we offer our

students and their parents. We want to lift them up and not keep them in their place, as society often does. They need to feel a sense of accomplishment and pride, not feel ashamed. If generosity is given with expectation of work, then families will have a better chance of breaking the cycle of oppression. Educators need to constantly remind themselves of their role and not to become oppressors. One of the most important roles as an educator is to provide parents with a support system so they can help their children at home. All parents find out rather quickly that children do not come with an instruction manual. The home/school connection is critical and provides the parents with the opportunity to get involved. Weekly homework assignments need to be accompanied by directions to the parents so they know what to do when the folder arrives after school. This allows them to play an active role in their child's education without offending them or making them feel inferior. If teachers do not communicate effectively with their parents, then the parents may be insulted or offended by their actions. Positive parent communication with just the right amount of support is essential to the success of a reading program for struggling readers and breaking the cycle of oppression.

**Final Reflection: No Child Left Behind**

"All children have potential" (Delpit, 2012, p. 5). All children are born with an equal amount of potential to do well in school. Our society, not the children's abilities, is what limits the potential of children. To help one child and



not another is unethical and immoral. What does matter is that all children are given the same opportunities to be successful in school.

Teaching older struggling readers how to read requires educators to meet students where they are, assess strengths and weaknesses and then to develop a plan of action to meet their needs. No one approach works for all students. Addressing their weaknesses through the use of multisensory skill practice, fluency with prosody, and metacognition bridges the gap between phonics and comprehension.

Identifying older struggling readers who were not apparent in the younger grades is critical. Administrators and educators cannot assume students who made it to third or fourth grade do not have reading difficulties. Screeners for older students need to be used to identify these students and come up with a plan of action to determine the best way to teach these strugglers. By meeting students where they are in their reading, teachers can dig deeper and provide their students with a more thorough understanding of how to be a good reader.

If traditional methods have not worked, it is time for a change. It has been proven in education that a lack of reflective teaching practices and repeating the same lessons year after year is not effective. The braiding of Scarborough's rope explains the intricately choreographed ballet of learning how to read. These skills require years of practice at a child's independent and instructional reading levels. Only then will "No Child be Left Behind."

## **Research Design and Methodology**

### **Study Setting and Participants**

The setting for this study is a rural intermediate school in northeastern Pennsylvania. The school is the only intermediate school in the district and the second largest building with approximately 1200 students, 400 of whom are enrolled in the fourth grade class. The present demographics of the district are as follows: 93% White, 3% Hispanic, 2% Black, and less than 1 % Native American. Currently, 9% of the student population in the district is eligible for free or reduced lunch.

The district has a 97% graduation rate, with most of its seniors going on to a four or two-year college. The district has met Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) the past three consecutive years. The district offers special education and English as a Second Language (ESL) services to students in need in all buildings. Response to Intervention (RtII) is implemented in all buildings except the middle school. Title I is only offered at one of the elementary and the intermediate schools. The buildings all follow a similar schedule. One block of each day is designated for intervention based on each child's needs, including enrichment. This common time allows for the scheduling of interventions.

Intermediate struggling readers are given intervention through RtII in our district. There are three tiers of intervention and then Title I Reading. The RtII team places students with weaknesses in comprehension into the tiered

interventions. Students who struggled in decoding and comprehension are placed in Title I Reading if they meet following criteria: fourth grade students who scored basic or below basic on the PSSA, the bottom 25th percentile on a district standardized reading assessment, and scored strategic or intensive on the Core Phonics Survey.

The poverty rate, 5.5%, and free and reduced lunches, 10.9%, have reached an all time high for the district. The maximum enrollment for fourth grade Title I reading is 32 students divided into four groups of eight, however, there are only 25 fourth grade students currently enrolled. Seven of those students have Individual Education Plans (IEP), one is an ESL student, and two have 504 plans. 23 students are white, and one student is African American, and one student is Indian. Two of these students are defined as having low socioeconomic status according to the Pennsylvania State Guidelines.

### **Data Gathering Methods**

While gathering data over the duration of my sixteen-week study, I relied on several different methods of collection to ensure that my data were triangulated. Hendricks suggests, "A researcher must consider how to best ensure that the findings of (the) study are credible and valid" (2009, p. 79). With Hendrick's advice in mind, it was important for me to be able to analyze reliable and credible data and use them to guide my instruction and meet the needs of my students. In the end, I could then share our stories of struggles and triumphs with

other educators so they too could better meet their students' needs. The data I collected were gathered in the forms of surveys, interviews, field log notes, and student artifacts, checklists of metacognition strategies, student journals, and Running Record assessments.

**Surveys and interviews.** When carrying out this study, I wanted to make sure my students and I could learn from each other. Since it was the beginning of the school year and we did not know each other, I thought a survey and interview would be a good way for me to get to know my students and they could get to know each other.

On the first day of class, I surveyed the students using the *Garfield Reading Attitude Survey* about their feelings toward reading (Appendix B). "The recent emphasis on enhanced reading proficiency has often ignored the important role played by children's attitudes in the process of becoming literate" (McKenna and Kear, 1990, p. 626). A child's attitude about reading is an important piece of the puzzle for a researcher to know. The results of the survey provide the researcher with the students' attitudes about recreational versus academic reading and a students' interpretation of their attitude versus their ability. I saved the results of the pre survey and compared them to the students' post survey at the end of the study. I also collected data through a student interview. I had the students interview each other about their reading lives at the beginning and end of this study. I used these data to hear first- hand what my students thought about

reading. "Interviews provide richer data because you are able to probe further" (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010, p. 163). Unlike the survey, the interview provided a narrower glimpse into the struggling readers' thinking. The interview questions (Appendix C) were prewritten for this purpose. This allowed me to examine why certain reading behaviors and attitudes existed and gave me insight on how I might go about changing them. I had the students interview each other because I felt they would give more honest answers to their peers rather than to me. Children tend to want to please their teachers by saying what the teacher wants to hear so I wanted to limit this variable as much as possible.

**Field log.** During this study, I kept a field log of observations I made. Hendricks suggests using more than one type of data. "Whereas artifacts can help you decide whether an intervention has had an impact observational data can help determine why an intervention was successful or unsuccessful and how the context of the setting impacted the study" (Hendricks, 2009, p. 90). It is critical that researchers understand what type of data they will glean from the observations they make. As a result, my log is arranged as a double entry journal. It consists of two parts, the student observations and quotes and researcher's ideas, thoughts, concerns and reflections. On the left, I recorded student observations. I wrote down student comments, recorded their behaviors, and made notes of areas of difficulty during these observations. Student observations allowed me to document the observed experiences of many different students within a class

period. On the right, at the end of each day, I reflected upon what I witnessed first-hand. These reflections on my observations helped me to gauge the success of my daily lessons and adjust future lessons. In this study, this evidence led me to two critical pieces of evidence. First, along with the Scholastic Reading Inventory Score, Running Record and Core Phonics Survey gave me a better understanding of where my students were in their development of reading. Second, using the field log, reading survey and interviews helped me to triangulate their reading attitude before and after the study. Student observations allowed me to comment about the observed experiences of many different students within a class period.

**Student artifacts.** A large portion of my data for my thesis came from my students' artifacts. By examining student-generated artifacts, I could see their strengths and weaknesses in their decoding and comprehension. Hendricks suggests, "If your study focuses on student achievement, you will want to choose student-generated artifacts, such as assignments, projects, tests scores or other types of work, as a data source in your study" (Hendricks, 2009, p. 81). Her advice helped to guide my instruction to meet the needs of my students on a daily basis. Students kept a folder of all of the strategies that were modeled and practiced along with the library of independent books they had read. This served as their tool box to use when meaning breaks down. Samples of their work were collected weekly and copied into my field log. I focused on the metacognitive

decoding and comprehension strategies they used and made note of them as evidence of their thinking while they were reading an independent reading book.

**Checklists of metacognition.** As I modeled and then the students practiced metacognitive decoding and comprehension strategies, the students kept a checklist of the skills that showed evidence of their understanding. At first, their understanding was not very clear, however, as they practiced, discussed and reflected their understanding increased. The notes on the students' checklist indicated their level of understanding. At each stage of development, students had to go to their tool box and use the tool that would help them to understand what to do. Then they had to keep a tally mark of the strategies they used and show evidence of using it in their book. At the end of each lesson, they had to reflect upon their results. As a class, we tallied up the group's results to see which strategies were used more or less. Then they discussed ways to get better at the strategies they did not use as much. Students set a goal to practice the strategy they used the least for the week. I continued to make notes and reflect on their progress throughout this study. In the end, this helped me discover themes and questions and create hypotheses.

**Student journals.** The student journals played a critical role in examining student thoughts and attitudes about reading throughout the study. McRae and Guthrie explain, "A teacher who controls every aspect of reading instruction is sending the clear message to students that their opinions and preferences do not

matter" (2008, p. 5). For this reason, it is critical for researchers to have students reflect on their reading experiences and give them an opportunity to share their feelings. Students need to know that their opinions and preferences do count! Using the surveys, interviews and journals, I was able to see what motivated my students and what did not. It allowed me to peer through a window into the lives of my struggling readers.

### **Trustworthiness Statement**

In order to establish trustworthiness within my study, I had to first start with protecting the rights of my students. The first step in the process to protect their rights was to apply for permission from the HSIRB at Moravian College for permission to carry out my study (Appendix D). Upon receiving their approval, I contacted my principal and the board of education for permission to carry out my study (Appendix E). Once my study was approved by the board of education, I then asked my students' parents for permission for their children to participate in my study (Appendix F). The letter offered parents an opportunity to ask questions about the action research process and discuss any way it may affect their child. It also created a stronger line of communication between the parents and me. This is critical for struggling readers.

To further assure confidentiality, I assigned a pseudonym for each of my students. These pseudonyms were used when identifying student work,



throughout my field log and on student assessments. All student work samples, assessments, my field log, and reflections were kept in a locked office.

### **Data Triangulation**

To further increase the trustworthiness of my study, I used data triangulation. "Triangulation is a method in which multiple forms of data are collected and compared to enhance the validity and credibility of a research study" (Hendricks, 2009, p. 80). The data I chose to triangulate included participant observations, artifacts, and student surveys and interviews. After analyzing these data, I had a clearer picture of how students use metacognition for decoding and comprehension. The data show the various stages of development in thinking of my students which is an important piece of evidence to my study. These data helped me to plan future lessons to move my students into the next deeper level of thinking while remaining in their Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978).

### **Researcher Bias**

Hendricks suggests "Engaging in reflection at the beginning of the research process is one way to clarify any initial biases" (p. 116). So prior to my study, I thought long and hard about my experiences with teaching reading. I did not realize the depth and intricate dance of teaching reading. Reading was reading and it was taught like any other subject. My experience up to this point was teaching science to older students and teaching fourth grade. It was not until

my own daughter began to struggle with reading and I did not know how to help her that I realized reading was much more complicated than I originally thought. Even after becoming a reading specialist I thought I had a much better understanding of the reading process. Once I began teaching my intervention group, I quickly learned that there was still more I did not know about struggling readers and that I had better put aside any preconceived ideas about how they learned in order to be an unbiased researcher. Instead, I opened the floor to my students and listened to what they had to say about their reading and their struggles.

### **Researcher Group**

To increase my credibility and validity, I also joined a teacher research group consisting of peer teacher researchers enrolled in the Reflective Practice Seminar (Hendricks, 2009, p. 75). My research group and I met weekly to discuss our findings for the week. We shared our interpretations of the data and then designed a plan of action for the following week as we continued our studies. Hendricks suggests using peer debriefing to "provide alternative interpretations, help point out your biases and the way your values may be coloring your interpretations" (p. 114). As a researcher group, we were able to share new ideas and insights from the data we collected that we had not noticed on our own. This was another way in which I increased the validity of my study.

## **Summary**

Action research, unlike quantitative research, has required me to rely on my students, their work, their understanding, and their attitudes about reading. It was critical that they took my study seriously and gave me 'real' feedback, not fictitious results. It was extremely important for me to provide them with a safe and friendly environment so they were willing to share their true feelings. To break the ice, I shared my early struggles as a reader with them, and in turn they opened up and shared their reading life with me. My students were honest and hard-working and trusted me to represent their views about reading. This teacher-student relationship was important to establish prior to collecting the data for my study.

## Chapter 4: My Story

### The Misunderstood Struggling Reader

#### **Scenario 1:**

*I don't know this word. How do you say it? This doesn't make any sense. What do I do now? The teacher said to hurry up, but I can't. My stomach hurts. I want to go home. Can I go to the nurse?*

#### **Scenario 2:**

*This is stupid! Why do we have to read this dumb book anyway? She said I'm supposed to reread this. How many times? It still doesn't make sense. I give up! Hey John, this class is stupid. The teacher is so mean. Can you believe we have to do this? Let's just fill in any answer. It doesn't matter.*

#### **Scenario 3:**

*I don't know what to do. I am not about to raise my hand and ask for help. Everyone will look at me and think I am dumb. I'll just pretend like I'm reading. She'll never know I'm not reading. Oh no, here she comes!*

The reading lives of twenty-seven fourth graders were examined and it was determined they were struggling readers. The four groups of six to eight students showed up at my door the second day of school with eyes as big as saucers wondering who I was and how I was going to help them. Little did they know, I was wondering the same thing. How was I going to help these struggling readers find success with reading? The program had never existed at the

intermediate level prior to last year. It was my job to create a research-based program to help these students grow in their reading. Many students are assessed for a specific learning disability, but do not qualify. With a mountain of evidence and a need growing larger by the day, I set out on a journey of enlightenment and searched for the best practices to help older struggling readers.

Through the eyes of my students, you will see their failures and successes as they rise and fall with the tides learning how to read. Their day-to-day struggle to survive in an environment surrounded by reading is remarkable and uplifting. Join us on our amazing journey to becoming life-long readers. The names will soon be forgotten, but the accomplishments will resonate for a lifetime. "And the ones who come after us will not be so different either. We are like leaves of the same tree, separated by many autumns" (Gilliland, Gradpre, and Heide, 1999, p. 48).

## Behind the Scenes: Meet the Cast



**Dan:** Dan is a fourth grader who enjoys four-wheeling and the outdoors. He struggles with decoding, tracking lines of a book, and fluency. His reading is very choppy as a result.



**Nick:** Nick is a fourth grade student who enjoys nonfiction books. He struggles with decoding and fluent reading. Nick often reverses letters such as b, d, p, and q. His reading is robotic. Nick wants to be a paleontologist when he grows up.



**Oscar:** Oscar is also a fourth grade student. He struggles with decoding and letter reversals as well. Oscar's strength is his comprehension. His reading is fluent until he gets to a word he does not recognize.



**Holly:** Holly is a fourth grade student who is very social. She is quite puzzling. She lacks confidence in her reading and always asks for reassurance that she is saying a word correctly rather than using the word attack strategies she has been taught. Holly tends to guess first and think second. Her reading is constantly interrupted by miscues and questions; therefore, her fluency and comprehension are very poor.



**Drake:** Drake is a fourth grader who would rather take the easy way out than work hard and be proud of his accomplishments. This Drake struggles with decoding, fluency, and comprehension. Sports are more important and he is too cool for school.



**Joey:** Joey is a hard worker at times. He gets mad at himself if he does not do his work. Joey struggles with decoding and fluency. He lacks support at home with his reading and would benefit from daily reading outside of school.



**Ricardo:** Ricardo is also a fourth grader. He verbalizes his thoughts to understand different concepts or ideas. His speech is almost a stutter because of the thinking he is doing while he is talking. Ricardo struggles with decoding and fluency. His reading is choppy.



**Heather:** Heather is a very quiet fourth grader. She has a past history with speech issues and tends to speak very quietly and infrequently. Heather struggles with decoding and fluency. She is a hard worker and pushes herself to improve.



**Kate:** Kate is a fourth grader who makes her presence known. She is very bossy which makes learning for her difficult. Kate struggles with decoding. Kate does not write the letters that go with the sounds she hears.



**Mallory:** Mallory is a fourth grader who loves attention. She enjoys the outdoors and climbing trees. Mallory struggles with decoding and fluency. She tends to guess at words rather than use the decoding strategies she has learned to figure out the word.



**Samantha:** Samantha is also a fourth grader. She struggles with decoding and fluency. Her fluency is very choppy when she reads.



**Colby:** Colby is a victim of DIBELS. He reads quickly and without comprehension. Colby also tries to read books that are too difficult for him.



**Keith:** Keith struggles with decoding and fluency. Vowels and digraphs are the most difficult for him.



**Ashlynn:** Ashlynn is a happy, carefree fourth grader with a zest for life. She struggles with speech and decoding. Ashlynn does not hear the sounds correctly and it affects her speech, reading and writing.



**Elizabeth:** Elizabeth is a very determined little girl. She has struggled with reading for years but never gives up. Her mother works with her every night at home as well. Elizabeth has difficulty with multistep thinking, decoding and comprehension.



**Molly:** Molly is a sweet little girl with anxiety. She struggles with decoding and fluency.

## Act 1: In the Beginning

### Scene 1: Getting Lost in a Book

During the first weeks of school, I spent a great deal of time getting to know my students. We shared our likes and dislikes, activities, and our favorite books. Sadly, many of my students did not like to read for enjoyment.

"Did you ever get lost in a book?" I asked them.

"I lose my page all the time," Ricardo chuckled.

Another student, Dan, commented, "I sometimes get stuck on words in the book."

I quickly realized they did not know what getting lost in a book meant. I searched my book shelf for one of my favorite books, *The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore* by William Joyce. I could not wait to share it with my students, so I introduced the book and began to read. The following is a summary of William Joyce's book.



Figure 4.1. *The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore* by William Joyce.



*Morris' life was sad and lacked color, even though he wrote all of the time. He wrote in an orderly fashion about his life. One day his life was turned upside down by a tornado and his home and writing were gone.*



**Figure 4.2. Life can be unpredictable and force us to change.**

Often struggling readers reach a point where the gap begins to widen. Typically, it is between third and fourth grade, as it is with my struggling readers. In order to help my students, I had to figure out why they were struggling. Just as Morris Lessmore struggled with his life, my students were struggling with their own reading lives. It started with this book.



**Figure 4.3. The beginning of a new day.**

*As Morris journeyed through the countryside wondering what to do, he looked up only to discover a woman being whisked away by flying books. She looked down at him as if she was trying to tell him something.*

Up to this point in the story, all of the pictures were black and white, but when the lady with the books appeared, the pages turned to color.

"Did you notice anything in the picture on this page compared to this page?" I asked.

"That page is not in color and that page is," Nick pointed out.

"Why do you think the author changed from black and white to color?" I asked.

"Maybe he is trying to tell us something," Mallory suggested.

"Let's keep reading and see if we can figure it out," I suggested.

*Without a word, she let one of her books fall to the ground where it glided onto a white picket fence. Morris stared in disbelief. Books couldn't fly, could they? The book tempted Morris with its colorful pages and stories. Soon Morris was following the book.*



**Figure 4.4.** Life with color.

"Why do you think he liked the book? I asked.

"Maybe it was one of his favorite books from a kid," Mallory suggested.

"Look, it's Humpty Dumpty!" exclaimed Ricardo.

"Oh, like a nursery rhyme book," Dan chimed in.

"Do you think Morris is going to follow him?" I asked.

"Yes," they all chorused.

"Why?" I asked.

"Maybe he likes the book and wants to read it," Mallory suggested.

"Yeah," the rest of the group agreed.

The students stared at the book in anticipation, waiting for the page to turn and the story to unravel. Their eagerness to hear the story created a sense of excitement in the room and I found myself tickled by their enthusiasm. Was this the same group of students who said they did not like reading? I continued reading with mounting excitement.



**Figure 4.5. What is this place?**

*The book led Morris to a building, but this was no ordinary building. There were books flying in and out of the front door. In fact,*

*the building was actually built from stone books! Morris did not know where to look first. Slowly, he climbed the pencil lined stairs to the front door. Perched overhead of the door frame was a wise old owl waiting for his arrival.*

"What do you think he will find inside? I asked before turning the page.

"I don't know," Andrew answered.

"I think there will be books," Nick responded.

"Why do you think there will be books?" I asked Nick.

"They are flying in and out of the door," Nick concluded.

"Tomorrow, we will continue reading," I explained. "It is time to go. For tonight, I want you to read one of the books you selected and try to enjoy a book like Morris did!"

The following day, we began by setting reading goals.

## **Scene 2: Up, Up and Away!**

As we were reading Morris Lessmore, I lead my students to look deeper into the story.

"Do you notice anything around the room that might go with the story we are reading?" I asked them. The room was decorated in Dr. Seuss characters, quotes, and books.

"Yes, in the story the lady was flying away with balloons that looked like books. It's like the poster up there," Mallory pointed to the poster with the saying:

*"The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn the more places you'll go."* by Dr. Seuss (Geisel, 1978, p. 33).

My students decided they wanted to create hot air balloons, which I hung from the ceiling, hoping I wouldn't have to take them down (Figure 4.6). The balloons were filled with their reading goals, books they read, books they wanted to read and their favorite books. They were daily reminders to the students about the reading they planned to do. Here are a few examples of goals they set for themselves.



**Dan:** "My goal is to ge better at reading."



**Nick:** "My goal is more rding. I want to be a paleontologist when I grow up."



**Oscar:** "My goal is to **R**ead more **d**ooks."



**Holly:** "My goal is I what to Get beter at Read."



**Drake:** "My goal is to get better at reading."



**Joey:** "My goal is remebbring what I read."



**Ricardo:** "My goal is to get better at reading."



**Heather:** "My goal is I what to get beter at read."



**Kate:** "My goal is to read 50 books."



**Mallory:** "I don't have a goal because I wasn't paying attention."



**Samantha:** "My goal is to read 50 books."



**Andrew:** "My goal is to read 100 books."



**Colby:** "My goal is to read more flooentle."



**Keith:** "My goal is to read more books."



**Ashlynn:** "My goal is to read Nancy Drew."



**Elizabeth:** "My goal is to read more books."



**Molly:** "My goal is to read 50 books."



**Figure 4.6.** Student balloons with goals.

## **Classroom Rewards**

To keep my students motivated toward reaching their goal, I set up a reading reward chart. Students had to read daily and complete homework and if they did they were rewarded for their work. They earned a sticker every time they read at home or completed an assignment (Figure 4.7). Stickers could then be cashed in for prizes (Appendix G). In the end, what I discovered was that struggling readers need to be motivated extrinsically through rewards. Some require immediate gratification, while others wanted to save for a larger reward. However, once the routine of daily reading of a "Just Right" book was established the motivation began to shift from extrinsic to intrinsic and the students required less rewards. Establishing the habit was critical to shifting the motivation.



**Figure 4.7. Rewards**

## **Thousand Page Challenge**

Students also had the opportunity to participate in the Thousand Page Challenge to help them reach their reading goal. Their classroom teachers and I teamed up to help our students read a thousand pages. They had free choice of

books as long as it was a "Just Right" book. My students earned a free book from Scholastic by reading a thousand pages from me and they also earned the classroom reward for the same thousand pages from their classroom teacher. We have a goal chart outside of my door to keep track of our overall pages read (Figure 4.8). This challenge runs for the entire school year. By the end of my study, some students had reached this goal, and some students claimed to have reached this goal. A few students decided to say they read, but really did not just to get the free book or reward from their teacher. As a result the teachers and I had to require the students to write a summary of each book.



Figure 4.8. Pages read

### Scene 3: Taking Inventory

As much as I wanted to continue reading books to my students, I had to get down to business and take inventory of my students current reading and motivation levels. I promised them we would continue reading after I collected our pre-assessments. The students were as happy about the pretests as I was.



After the CORE Phonics Survey and Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) were collected, I had students complete a Running Record with me so I could hear them read and take notes on their decoding, fluency and comprehension. This was repeated at the end of my study as well.

### **Running Record**

The results of the running record helped me to determine my students' independent and instructional reading levels as well as their strengths and weaknesses in reading (Appendix H). The assessment measured their accuracy and rate while reading, expression, phrasing and intonation. It also measured their ability to retell a story and their comprehension of the story. The results could then be matched up with a reading level and grade equivalent (Appendix I). This gave me a true picture of their ability to read on their independent reading level.



**Dan:** "How am I going to read this," Dan asked of a book he thought was too long.

"You can do it. Just take your time," I reminded him. He did read the story, although one word at a time with his finger. I quickly noted his frustration, decoding struggles and lack of fluency. His confidence in his reading was very low. This was definitely an area I was going to have to help him strengthen. The results of the running record were alarming. Dan was reading on a Level L to

read fluently and with comprehension. This is proficiency for March of grade 2. This placed him over a year below grade level. He read the first 100 words at 86 words per minute with 100% accuracy; however, his reading was extremely choppy. He also had difficulty tracking the sentence from one line to the next. Dan's difficulty is amplified by his impulsive behavior.



**Nick:** Nick read the story in a monotone, robotic voice. His reading broke down when he encountered multi syllable words. His voice was soft and unsure. Confidence was definitely an area I was going to have to help him strengthen. Nick read 80 words in a minute on level N with three miscues. The results are equivalent to November of third grade. This placed him almost a year below grade level. Nick did not show evidence of self-monitoring. The retell lacked important information and details. When prompted with questions, he answered them with 75% accuracy. He also struggled with writing what he heard. For example, he wrote ciluump for the word clump, milt for milk, and burnt for brunt. Nick also struggled with letter reversals when he wrote.



**Oscar:** Oscar is a free spirit. At the beginning of the year, he struggled with organization. As Oscar read, I was surprised by his number of miscues because his Lexile score was proficient. A Lexile score is a measurement of

reading comprehension. He is able to get the gist of the story by figuring some of the words out and drawing conclusions. What I did notice was Oscar used his finger to track words, reversed word order in a sentence when reading aloud, and sometimes wrote letters and numbers backward. These were areas I was going to have to help him strengthen. The results of the running record were surprising. Oscar was reading on a Level M to read fluently and with comprehension. This is proficiency for June of grade 2 yet his Lexile was proficient. The running record placed him over a year below grade level. He read the first 100 words at 72 words per minute with 98% accuracy; however, his reading was extremely choppy. This was probably the result of the number of self-corrections he made while reading.



**Holly:** Holly took one look at the short story and asked, "Do I have to read the whole thing?" She was clearly anxious about reading. I told her only to look at one paragraph at a time and not to worry about the others. It was clear by her behavior that timers and reading assessments made her nervous, but why? I had to figure this out so I could help her. Holly read 39 words in a minute and her accuracy was 96% on level N. This text was too difficult for her, so I moved her down to an M. This places her at the beginning of third grade with her reading. When she approached a word she did not know, she guessed. She did not apply any word attack strategies. She also had difficulty remembering what she read.

Her instruction was focused on decoding, word attack strategies, self-monitoring and fluency. Comprehension was included in her word attack and self-monitoring strategies.



**Drake:** Drake does not like work. For a struggling reader, this is not an asset. I had to come up with a plan to motivate him. Drake read at an independent level of N. This is equivalent to November of third grade. He read 96 words with 96% accuracy. His miscues were close in spelling to the original words, but did affect meaning. He did show evidence of slowing down to decode. Drake had great difficulty with the retell, although he was able to answer most of the comprehension questions. He did not want to look back into the story during the retell or answering questions. His fluency is primarily in two word phrases, with an occasional three or four word phrase. Drake also has difficulty hearing digraphs. For example, he wrote suck for shock. He also reverses his b's and d's. The main focus of his instruction was on the letter/sound system, word attack strategies, and comprehension.



**Joey:** Joey wants to get better at reading and school work, but does not have the guidance at home that is necessary. His work is in spurts of being completed and then spurts of not being completed. Joey is very proud when his work is complete, so I tried to remind him of how good it made him feel when he did not complete his work. Joey read independently on level N, which is

equivalent to November of third grade. He read 88 words per minute with 100% accuracy. On the second hundred words, his miscues included meaning changing mistakes, but he did show evidence of self-correcting. Joey was able to retell some of the story, but was confused about some of the important details. His comprehension of the story was proficient when prompted with questions. I tried the next level up since his accuracy was 100%, but it was much too difficult for him. Joey's instruction was designed around deciding, fluency and summarizing.



**Ricardo:** Ricardo is a very literal thinker. It takes him time to gather his thoughts and then say what is on his mind. Sometimes it sounds like a stutter, but it is not consistent. His reading was on level M, which is equivalent to September of third grade, placing him a year below grade level. Ironically, he scored proficient on the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) which measures comprehension and grade level. He read 96 words per minute with 96% accuracy. He has difficulty tracking sentences and skipped a line. Ricardo could retell and answer literal questions, but struggled with feelings and inferential questions. I am concerned about the combination of his weaknesses. His lessons will be designed around reading emotions and inferential thinking.



**Heather:** Heather is a very hard worker and motivated. She has difficulty with decoding and fluency. Ironically, her comprehension is strong. Heather had

an independent reading level of N which is equivalent to November of third grade. Her rate was 70 words per minute with 99% accuracy on the first 100 words. Her miscues after that affected the meaning of the story. Heather's retell was strong and included important details. I had to focus her instruction on decoding and fluency strategies. Heather also has difficulty pushing her voice out, and received speech in the lower grades. I asked the speech teacher to listen to her read to ease my mind. Projecting her voice was also something we had to practice.



**Kate:** Kate saw a word she did not know and guessed. There was not any work attack strategies applied to the word. Ironically, her Lexile reading score was proficient. Even with all of her miscues, she was still able to comprehend the story. Kate's independent reading level was N. She read 95 words in a minute with 96% accuracy. This is equivalent to November of third grade. Kate also did not write the sounds she heard. She particularly struggled with digraphs. We worked on this throughout the study. Kate's instruction was designed to focus on letter-sound recognition and word attack strategies.



**Mallory:** Mallory read fluently until she came to a word she did not know. Her reading broke down and the meaning was lost. Mallory's independent reading level was N. This places her at November of third grade. I tried O with

her, but it was too difficult. On level O she was only able to read 51 words per minute with 94% accuracy. She had some understanding of the story, but her decoding and fluency impacted her comprehension. Her instruction was designed to focus on decoding and word attack strategies as well as fluency.



**Samantha:** Samantha has difficulty with fluency. Her reading is very choppy. Samantha was assessed at level N and was ready to move up to level O. She read 103 words per minute with 99% accuracy. This places her at January of third grade. She had difficulty with inferential questions. Her miscues were meaning changing, therefore, her instruction was designed to focus on decoding, word attack strategies and comprehension.



**Andrew:** Andrew did not like reading. He read 102 words with 99% accuracy on level N. He was ready to move up to level O. When he read, he lacked phrasing and did not stop at punctuation. He understood some of what he read, but not all of the key points. I suspected his need for speed when he read affected his comprehension. His instruction was designed to focus on fluency and comprehension.



**Colby:** Colby tried reading on level P, but this was too difficult for him. He read 59 words per minute with 98% accuracy. Every time he approached a word he did not know, he guessed. There was no evidence of self-monitoring or

word attack strategies. His comprehension was very poor. His instruction was designed to focus on word attack strategies, self-monitoring, and comprehension.



**Keith:** Keith is very impulsive which makes reading very difficult. His independent reading level is at M. He read 95 words per minute with 98% accuracy. His miscues were meaning changing. Keith's fluency was choppy and awkward. His overall comprehension of the story was good when prompted with questions. The retell was more difficult for him. The focus of his instruction was word attack strategies, fluency and comprehension.



**Ashlynn:** Ashlynn's fluency is held back by her speech and decoding. Her independent reading level is O. She read level P at 52 words per minute and 98% accuracy, but this was too difficult for her. Ashlynn did not stop at periods when she was reading orally. Her retell included some of the important facts, but not all. Her comprehension was at 100% when prompted with questions. Ashlynn did show evidence of self-correcting while reading. The focus of her instruction was word attack strategies and fluency.



**Elizabeth:** Elizabeth's fluency is held back by her decoding. Her independent reading level is N. She read level O at 57 words per minute and 96% accuracy, but this was too difficult for her. Elizabeth slowly in two to three word



phrases. Her retell included some of the important facts. Her comprehension was at 50% even when prompted with questions. The focus of her instruction was on decoding and fluency.



**Molly:** Morgan read a level M with 98% accuracy, but her fluency was very slow and choppy. She read the passage at 58 words per minute. This is equivalent to June of second grade. Ironically, her retell and comprehension questions were answered thoroughly. It appeared her difficulty was with fluency. The focus of her instruction was on decoding and fluency.

### **Reading Attitude Survey**

After collecting the pre-reading assessments, I also collected a pre-Garfield Reading Attitude Survey. The results from the pre-Garfield Reading Attitude Survey reflected my students' reading attitudes for recreational and academic reading after the study. Below is a glimpse of the most remarkable results.

*How do you feel about starting a new book?*

My students do not like to start a new book. I had to get to the root of the reason as to why they did not like to read new books in order to help them overcome this.



*How do you feel about reading instead of playing?*

The majority of my students chose playing over reading a book.

This is not surprising for struggling readers. I had to find a way to change their minds.

*How do you feel about reading in school?*

Most of my students did not like reading as a subject in school.

Everyone has a favorite subject. A struggling reader was not going to select reading as their favorite subject. How was I going to make an impression on my students to get them to change their minds?

*How do you feel about learning from a book?*

Struggling readers do not like to learn from reading. The results of the survey proved this. I had to find a way to get them excited about learning and reading to learn. This was a huge challenge!

*How do you feel when it's time for reading in school?*

My students did not want to come to Title I Reading because they were missing a special to get extra help. To be honest, I cannot blame them. I had to come up with a way to motivate my students and get them past thinking about what they were missing and get them to see what they were gaining.

## Reading Life Interview

After measuring the reading attitude of my students, I found I still wanted to learn more about their lives as readers. I conducted a pre- and post-Reading Life Interview. To get authentic answers from my students, I had them interview each other rather than me interviewing them. I was concerned they would try to please me by saying something I wanted to hear rather than how they really felt about reading. Their answers seem to be a combination of being honest and trying to please me. Here's what they had to say in their own writing.



**Dan:** "Reading is okay. I do not like it because of the hard words. I like to read in my bedroom. My favorite series is I Sived. I read a moth. Nothing keeps me reading."



**Nick:** "I think reading is awesome. What I don't like about it is the hard words. I like to read in my bedroom. My favorite book is Orish Yoda. I read for 24 hours a day. Nothing makes me want to keep reading."



**Oscar:** "I like reading because it helps me learn. What I don't like about reading is you can't run and read at the same time. I like to read in my bedroom. The type of books I like to read are realistic fiction. I read every day for 1 hour. What keeps me reading is good books."



**Holly:** "Reading is good because I am bored. I like to read in my bed at night. I like to read Harroper. It is a little scary. I read for 30 minutes in bed. What keeps me reading is when they are interesting."



**Drake:** "I feel great about reading. I like to read in a hammock. My favorite magazine to read is the Lago Club. I read weekly. Lago magazines keep me reading."



**Joey:** "I love to read. Reading is annoying. I like to read in bed. My favorite book is Diar of a Wimpy Kid. I read weekly. What keeps me reading is I like to find mystery."



**Ricardo:** "I feel so,so about reading. I like to read easy words. I do not have a favorite place to read. I like the book Dirye of a wimpy kids. I read for an hour. The book keeps me reading."



**Heather:** "Sometimes reading makes me happy. I like to wine stouf. I like to read when im bord. I sit in a confy chare. I like to read chapter books. When I read, I stop at the next chapter. The summertime makes me want to read."



**Kate:** "Reading is awesome cause it is cool. I like to read cas I lern things. I like to read in bed. My favorite series is Jude Mude. I read for 5 hors ever day. I keep reading cause it is nice to read."



**Mallory:** "Good. Because times when I have nothing to do I read a book. I don't like it when people tell me to read. I read about four times a week. Laughter makes me want to keep reading."



**Samantha:** "I feel decint about reading because I like to read in my bed. I like to read scarey books and intristing. I like to read harey potter becuase it is a little scarey. I read a half an over. Instring Books keep me reading."



**Andrew:** "I don't like reading. I chachs my self. When I read, I read in my mom and dads bedroom. My favorite series is I sevriv. I read half and horur eche day. encouragement keeps me reading."



**Colby:** "I do not like to take reading time out of my fun. I don't like reading becuase there are 1,000 words on a page. If I do read, I like to read on the couch. My favorite series is servirevs. I read 30 min pre day. I want to keep reading when its fun."



**Keith:** "I do not like to reading. I don't like spelling out words. I like to read in my bed. Lego magazines are my favorite. I read 20 each day. larn more words keeps me reading."



**Ashlynn:** "Reading is a good activity becuase I like to see what happens. I like to read different genre. I don't like it when they don't tell you the end. My favorite place to read is my bedroom. I like to read *Dork Diaries*. I read about four hours a week. Interesting things keep me reading."



**Elizabeth:** "I love reading and I love to go to the library to look at books. My bedroom is my favorite room to read because I love to read on my bed. I like all books. I read every day for an hour. I love learning things that school does not teach."



**Molly:** "Reading makes me feel happy because I like it. I like to read at home in the office. I read every day for an hour. I like reading because I can get from my sister."

### **Sight Word Assessment**

Students were given an initial sight word pre-assessment from the Fry Sight Word list to see measure their sight reading ability and encoding ability (Appendix J). Typical words that confused them were "who" and "how", "when" and "where", "which" and "witch", and a few other tricky words. Students created their own ring of difficult sight words to practice with multisensory materials.

One technique they used was to trace the words on to a mesh square so they could feel the roughness of it. First they would make an index card of the word making sure to spell it correctly. Next, they would say the word out loud. Third, they would use their finger to spell the word on the mesh (Figure 4.9). Lastly, they repeated the word again out loud. Students were encouraged to try other rough surfaces at home as well. Other materials we used in the classroom included carpet, sand paper and clay. We practiced writing the words in different mediums as well including: colored chalk, dry erase markers and boards,

magnets, colored pencils, and crayons (Figure 4.10). This multisensory technique also helped students who were making reversals.



Figure 4.9. Mesh tactile squares

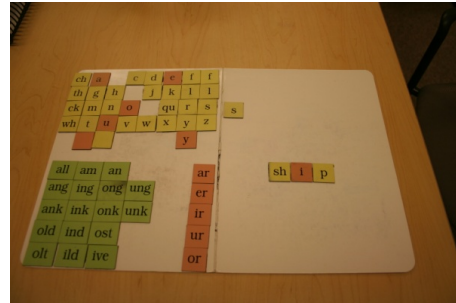


Figure 4.10. Magnet letters

#### Scene 4: Reading Room

In the Reading Life Interview, students were asked how often they read at home. Their responses ranged from not at all to five hours a day. As part of their homework the first week of school, my students were asked to find or create a favorite place to read at home. The following day, they shared their favorite places with their group. Sadly, some students revealed they did not have one. So I set up a Reading Room in the classroom to inspire students to create one of their own. Those who did find a favorite place to read were as follows



Drake: *in a hammock*



Heather: *I read when I'm bored on a comfy chare.*

Dan, Joey, Kate, Samantha, Holly, Nick, Oscar, and Keith: *I like to read in my bed.*



Colby : *I like to read on the couch.*



One day in class, Colby was so excited I thought he was going to explode.

"What are you so excited about?" I asked.

"I can't wait to go to the Reading Room today! I am reading this book and I cannot wait to see what happens next!" Colby exclaimed.

Wow, was this the same student who did not want to read at all at the beginning of the year? He was more interested in hanging out with his older brothers and playing video games. Right before my eyes he was transforming into a reader.

I couldn't help but ask him, "Colby, what are you going to do in the reading room?"

He answered wittingly, "Get lost in this book!"

This was music to my ears! The message was beginning to get through to my students. His classmates heard the conversation and they too couldn't wait to get lost in a book like Colby.

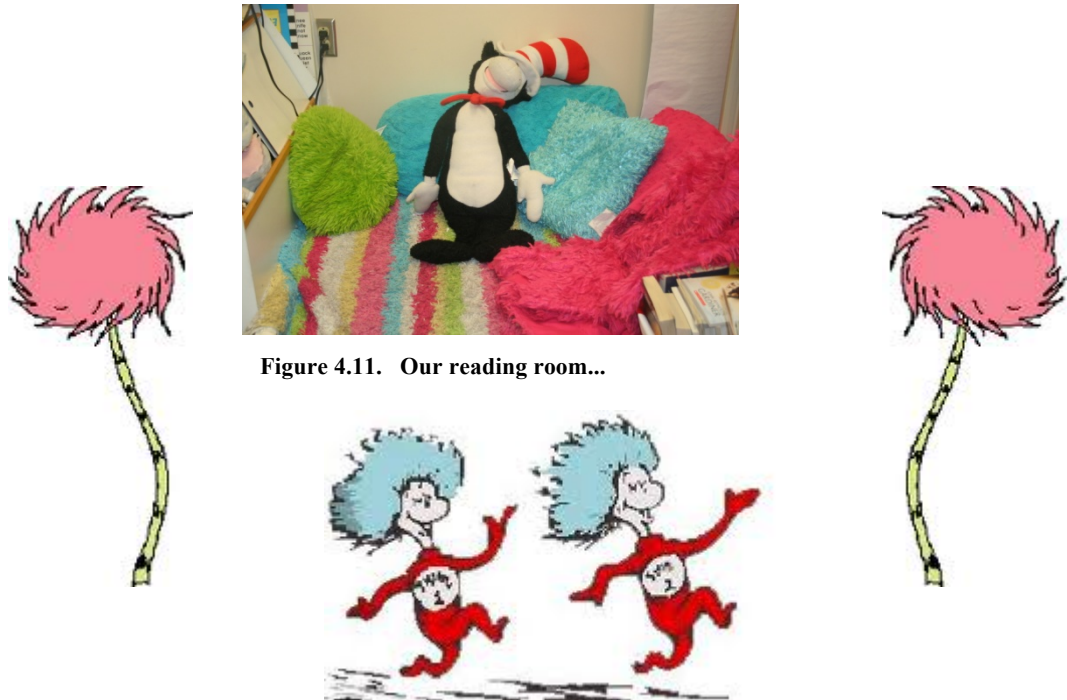


Figure 4.11. Our reading room...

### **Authentic Literature**

To help my students to get better at reading, they had to read more. Using the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) score, Running Record and Five Finger Rule, I was able to assist my students in finding books that were "Just Right." The Running Record by Columbia University's Teacher's College provided the running record. Their running record was created using Fountas and Pinnells leveling criteria. Books from *Reading A to Z* along with authentic literature were used for independent and instructional reading. I set up a classroom library full of authentic and leveled books at their reading levels so they had many different choices. The Reading Interest Inventory I collected helped me to stock my library with books that they preferred (Appendix K). Our librarian gave me old library



cards to use to keep track of my books since she has switched over to a computerized system. Some of the popular requests included:

*I Survived*

*Diary of a Wimpy Kid*

*Scary Stories*

*Lego Magazine*

*Cat in the Hat*

*Judy Moody*

*911*

*Dork Diaries*

*Magic Tree House*

The use of authentic literature to practice the skills they were learning not only motivated my students, but it also helped them to connect the skill in the context of a sentence. In Acts II and III, my students will share the strategies they used.

### **Leveled Readers**

Every week my students selected a new leveled reader. They chose the books and topics of their interest, on their level. The leveled readers used in our class were created by *Reading A to Z* and were also leveled with Fountas and Pinnell's leveling criteria. Because of all of the different leveling systems, *Reading A to Z* created a conversion chart so Lexile scores and Fountas and Pinnel's leveling systems can be compared (Appendix L ). The *Reading A to Z* leveled books are printable, high interest, low readability level, and short in length (Appendix M). I liked the leveled books because they met my students where they were, built their confidence and their endurance, were not too long and

intimidating, and provided my students with a wealth of background knowledge. These were all features that struggling readers needed in an independent reading book. The freedom of choice piqued their interest in the books. The books were not used to teach a specific leveled skill, but as an independent reading book to expose the students to the skills during reading. The strategies I taught and thinking I developed when using the leveled readers were vocabulary, decoding, fluency and comprehension. My students then carried these strategies and skills over to their authentic literature books.

The students were given five to ten minutes every Monday to make their selection. Some students used this time wisely, some did not.

One evening, I saw Keith and his mother at our Family Literacy Night and Keith did not look very happy.

"What's wrong?" I asked him.

"I am reading the Totem Pole book. I don't like it," he told me and his mother.

"Why did you pick that book?" I asked him.

His mother chuckled and asked him the same question. "Yes, Keith, why did you pick that book?"

Keith rolled his eyes and let out a humph, "I was in a hurry." Keith was in a hurry because he wanted to talk to his friend.

His mother used this opportunity to teach him the importance of selecting a book he likes instead of randomly grabbing a book. He moaned and groaned at home that week, but his mother proved her point. For that, I am grateful! Keith is much more selective about choosing his books now. I could have just had him select a new book midweek; however, he would not have learned this valuable lesson.

After using the leveled readers simply as a book to read at each student's level, I was able to see how useful they were. The fact that they could be duplicated and sent home with students who may not have had any other books at home to read was just one of the perks. Another asset of the leveled readers was the students could write in them. This was critical to my study. Students could make their thinking visible by writing in their leveled readers. Another asset was they helped my students to build background knowledge about subjects of interest at their level of reading.

"Mrs. Thomas, look at this," Joey called.

"What Joey?" I asked.

"Did you know that cats can swim? I never knew that! This is cool.

Look how much I can learn from reading! I love reading!"

"I like that Mis.Tommies says that we can pick a new level reader each week" Keith shared in his reflective journal.

"I love the leveled readers because they help me get better at reading and I can practice" Elizabeth shared from her reflective journal.

These were just a few of many similar conversations I had with my students. They had tried to read books that were too hard in the past and clearly gave up. By reading a book on their level, they were able to enjoy reading and learning. The last asset of reading a leveled reader was its length. They were not too long and not too short, just right. Struggling readers are intimidated by longer books and will tend to avoid them. The length of the leveled readers makes the task for a struggling reader manageable and helps them build endurance. As the levels progress, the number of words in the books increases and the print becomes smaller. It is gradual so the students do not realize it.

## **Scene 5: Building a Community**

### **Parent Involvement**

One of the most important things I learned as an educator is that we cannot do this alone. The parent-student-teacher triangle and the home and school connection was critical. I only had my students for forty minutes a day and they did not stop learning once they left school. Often parents do not understand what to do with their children, so it was critical that I communicated to my parents how to help their children. I also learned it is important to empower parents, not make

them feel inferior. After all, children do not come with an owner's manual so it was my job to guide the parents to understand how their children learned to read.

### **Take Home Folder**

Every student was given a folder at the beginning of the year. This communicated to the parents what we were doing on a weekly basis on a homework sheet. Then, information about how parents could help their children was given in the forms of parent letters, newsletters, graphic organizers and ho-to-directions. The folder also included a school calendar so parents could record the date and minutes read by their child (Appendix N).

### **Family Literacy Night**

In the fall, I held a Family Literacy Night to encourage families to get involved in their child's reading life. The activities were designed to be self-guided and walk the parents through the process of learning how to read (Appendix O). Based on the feedback from the parents who attended, this was very beneficial.



**Figure 4.12. Literacy Night**



**Figure 4.13. Literacy Night**

### **Performance**

To encourage parents to attend the Family Literacy Night and to build confidence in my struggling readers, I had my students present their Reader's Theater play to the parents. There will be another Family Literacy Night in the spring themed "Night at the Carnival".

### **Web Page**

In order to reach out to parents and build a stronger line of communication and support, my colleague and I designed a web page for our district. The purpose of this web site is to empower parents with the knowledge they need to help their children. A brief description of the web page can be found in (Appendix P). Parents also have a direct link to my teacher web site where they can check homework assignments, upcoming events, and contact me.

From my observations, the children of parents who used the tools I provided and worked with their children at home, made the greatest gains.

### **Scene 6: A Sneak Preview of Our Week**

At the beginning of the week, my students had to select a leveled reader. The first day and night my students read the book they selected, focused on how to pronounce the words, and circled the words they did not know. Then they had to do a word study on one or two of the words they had circled. The second day we worked on word attack strategies and decoding skills. Using the six syllable types and marking the words, students learned how to decode difficult words. In

addition, my students learned what to do when they did not know the meaning of a word. By the third day, students were ready to work on fluency. There were several different strategies we used in class and at home. Parents used echo reading to show their child what a good reader sounded like. Other activities, such as reader's theater and partner reading were also used. On Thursday, students learned and practiced different comprehension strategies. Once the foundational skills of comprehension were explicitly taught, my students were given strategies for self-monitoring and making thinking visible. By Friday, my students were ready to test out their new skills in an authentic reading book. They selected a book to read within their Lexile level or using the five finger rule if the Lexile was not available and were encouraged to read it over the weekend as well.

## **Act II: Places Everyone!**

### **Scene 1: Read Aloud**

*The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore*  
by William Joyce.



**Figure 4.14. Flying Books**

"The last time we were reading *The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore*, we left off talking about what he might find inside of the building with books flying in and out of the door," I reminded the group.

"Does anyone remember what they predicted? I asked before turning the page.

"I don't know," Andrew answered.

"I think there will be books," Nick responded.

"Why do you think there will be books?" I asked Nick.

"They are flying in and out of the door," Nick concluded.

"Well, today we are going to find out," I explained.

As I opened the book, the students waited in anticipation of what was to come. Then with a turn of the page, the much awaited picture was revealed.



**Figure 4.15.**

*Morris entered the mysterious building and looked around with wonder. There were books flying everywhere. He heard mumbling*



*and listened carefully. Morris then realized what he was hearing was the voices of the books, each telling their own special story. It was as if they were trying to get Morris to read them!*

"I knew it!" Nick said in a restrained tone.

"I did too," Dante chimed in, not wanting to be wrong.

"WWWell, wwwwhat do you know. Good job Nathan," Ricardo announced.

"Wow, why do you think the author set the scene up like this?" I asked.

"To make it more interesting," Mallory offered.

"Books can't really fly," Dan clarified.

"If you were a book in a library full of other books, how would you make sure someone picked you to read?" I asked.

"Well, if there were a lot of books, I would want to be heard," Oscar explained.

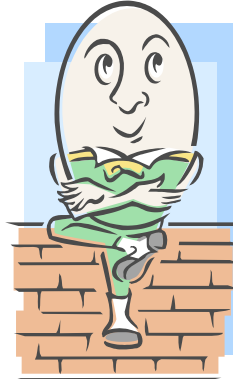
"Exactly! I cheered. "Every book wanted to be read by Morris, so they were trying to get his attention. "What book do you think he will select first?"

"Humpty Dumpty, " Nick answered in his monotone, strained voice.

"Yeah," the others agreed.

"Well, let's find out," I teased.

I slowly turned the page to build excitement and anticipation. The group sat on the edges of their chairs waiting for the answer. The beautiful illustration of Joyce Williams described it all. It was indeed Humpty Dumpty.



**Figure 4.16.**

*At that moment, Morris' life changed. He became a reader.*

*Morris no longer just wrote stories, he read them too.*

"Have you ever had a book grab your attention?" I asked.

"Yes," the group chorused.

"What attracted you to the book?" I wondered.

"The cover," Mallory responded.

"I get to pick the book myself," Andrew whispered.

"The words aren't too hard," Dan and Ricardo added.

"I look for books I can learn from," Oscar explained.

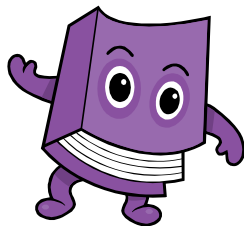
"Today you are going to select a book that is "Just Right" for you. We will continue reading Morris Lessmore tomorrow," I explained. The students responded with a grumble.

I used this opportunity to remind students how to choose a "Just Right" book. They were still selecting books at the library that were too difficult for them. We practiced the 5 Finger Rule with books from the classroom. Students then signed them out to read for fun.

### **Scene 2: Finding a "Just Right Book"**

In order to best help my students, I needed to meet them where they were in their reading development and motivate my reluctant readers. The one thing I noticed was my students would return from the library with a book that was too difficult for them. They were setting themselves up for failure. The first page or two they would struggle with the decoding and then the meaning would break down. Finally, they would just give up and think all reading was that difficult. The following week they would go to the library and repeat the same book selection process all over again. To bring an end to this cycle, I introduced how to select a "Just Right" book (Figure 4.17). I found my students need to practice this and be reminded to use this until it became a habit (Appendix Q). Week-by-week, the book choices became more and more appropriate.

*"I like the finger trick. It can help me find the perfect book" Keith shared in his reflective journal.*



## “Just Right” Books

1. Look at the cover.
2. Read the title and the author .
3. Read the blurb in the back.
4. Flip through the book.
5. Read the first page.
6. Use the 5 Finger Rule:

**0-1 Fingers- Too Easy**

**2-3 fingers- Just Right**

**4-5 Fingers- Too Hard**

**Figure 4.17. Just Right bookmark**

### **Scene 3: The Book Doctor**

"Who can remember where we left off last with *Morris Lessmore and the Fantastic Flying Book*?" I asked.

"Morris has just become a reader,"

"He was reading Humpty Dumpty,"

"Why do you think he had not read any books before then?" I asked.

"Maybe he didn't have any," Joey commented.

Joey's reply resonated in my head for weeks on end. Some children do not have books and their parents do not take them to the library.

"This is true, but there are places to get a good book. Where can we get books to read?" I asked.

"The library," Joey replied.

"Barnes and Nobel,"

"Our classroom,"

"Your room,"

"The book fair," they called out.

"All great places to look for books. Now let's see what Morris did with all of the books he found," I introduced the next section of the book.

As I turned the page, the students' eyes grew with curiosity.



**Figure 4.18.** The Book Doctor

*Morris organized the books day after day, but they were always getting mixed up. He also spent hours doctoring the books as if they were his patients.*

"What is Morris doing?" I asked.

"He's a doctor," they yelled.

"Do books need a doctor?" I asked.

"No," the group answered.

"What do they need?" I asked.

Silence...

"One of those people who works in a library..."

"Oh, a...a...librarian!" the group shouted.

"So what job do you think Morris has now?" I asked.

"He's a librarian," the group answered in chorus.

"What does it look like he is doing?" I asked.

"He's fixing books,"

"If the books can talk, then he is like a book doctor.

I used this opportunity to explain to my students that sometimes children have trouble reading and they need to be fixed up too, just like the books. I explained I was going to help them fix-up their reading so they too would love books like Morris and me. One of the ways to fix-up our reading is to make sure

we know what sounds go with what letters. To do this, we warmed up daily with a song, chant, cheer or rhyme to help us with the skill for the week.

#### **Scene 4: Warming Up**



#### **A New Twist on an Old Song**

After collecting the CORE phonics screener results, I was rather surprised to see how many students struggled with letter sounds, chunks of sounds within words, and the six syllable types in fourth grade (Appendix R). I needed to come up with phonics instruction that was not in isolation. After reading pages and pages of research reports and studies, I came up with a plan. I used a multisensory approach (visual, auditory and kinesthetic) to learn the sounds they were struggling with in the leveled and authentic literature. Each sound had a picture, word association and letter symbol(s). During the study, the students and I created songs, chants, and cheers to go with the sounds. They cheered out the vowels and their sounds, *Give me an A.../a/*. *Give me an E.../e/*, they sang the blues with the alphabet, *A...apple.../a/...B...bat.../b/....C...cat.../c/*. and they rocked the welded sounds, *all...ball.../all/*, *am...ham.../am/*, *an...fan.../an/*. The students selected and lead the song, chant or cheer they wanted to warm up with each day. Each week we learned a new word part or chunk and created new songs to go with them. When the students got to a word they could not pronounce, I

reminded them to think of the song, similar word, or picture that was associated with the sound to help them decode the word.

**Whole group:** Singing and snapping.

**Drake:** Excited and smiling from ear to ear.

**Keith:** Shy; did not want to participate at first

### **Scene 5: Word Study**

To build vocabulary and background knowledge, my students had to study an unknown word from their leveled reader using a graphic organizer similar to the Frayer Model. They were taught dictionary skills as well as how to use an electronic thesaurus and dictionary.com. The following day, my students shared their book and the word giving them trouble. At first, my students selected words that were easy. The word was written on the board for future discussion. I had to reinforce the importance of selecting a more difficult word. Each student shared in this manner. After all of the books were shared and the words were collected, I turned their attention to the words on the board. I asked the students to look for familiar patterns in each of the words. They marked the parts they knew and then I introduced the decoding skill for the week. I showed my students how to mark the new decoding skill and then had them practice on dry erase boards. Because students selected their own book and vocabulary, it made the assignment more meaningful (Appendix S).



## **Scene 6: Mark My Words!**

Decoding what is read was taken to the next level when students were required to write what they heard. By understanding the six syllable types in the English language students can not only decode words, they can encode words. Each week students were explicitly taught new word parts. As they were reading, they highlighted the word parts in their leveled readers or authentic literature. To help my students remember the letters and word parts, I used the songs from warming up to help them recall the sounds. They were also explicitly taught root words and affixes and their origins.

Students then had to write the difficult words they found in their leveled books on dry erase boards. Then they had to mark the words with the six syllable types. Most importantly, after they wrote the word on the dry erase board, they had to check what they wrote. At first, students tapped what they heard, and not what they wrote (Appendix T). Then I had them check again but they had to make sure they only tapped what they wrote. At first, they did not catch their mistakes because they tapped what they heard. However, by pointing this out to them, they gradually began to notice their mistakes. Again, this took practice. Once they mastered one syllable words, we advanced to multi syllable words. Although this task was more difficult, it was most beneficial. My students did not know the rules of where to divide syllables. Without this knowledge, it was difficult to sound out larger words. They also realized larger words can have

more than one of the six syllable types, which made sounding the word out even trickier.

### One Syllable Words

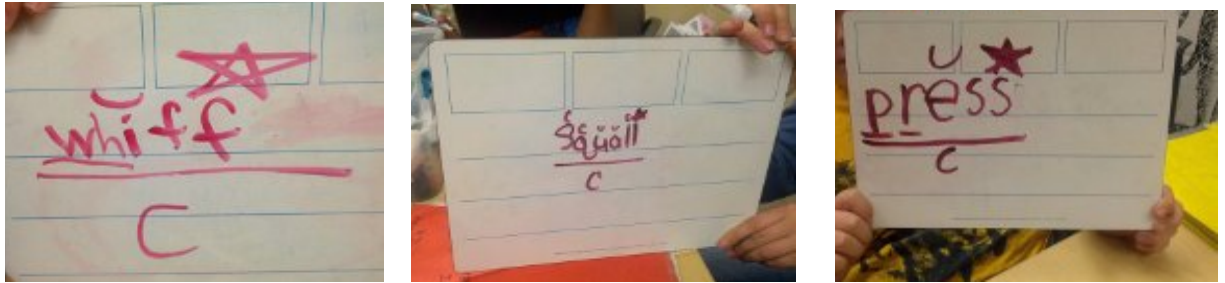


Figure 4.19. The vowel is closed and short.

### Multi Syllable Words

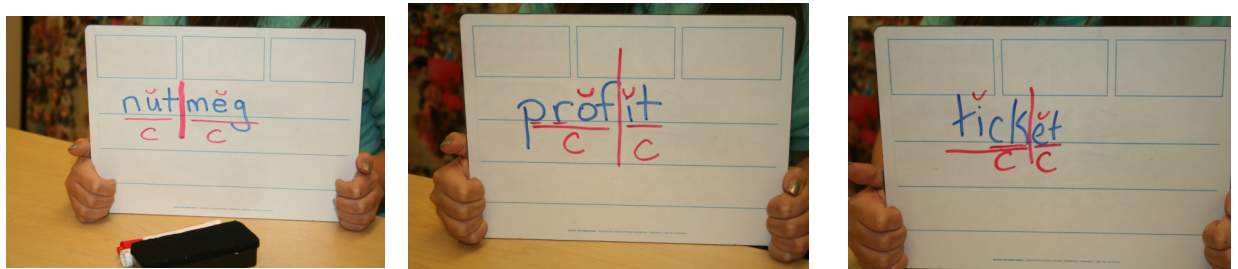


Figure 4.20. Each syllable can have a different vowel sound.

*"I like the bords and tapeing out sounds. I think it help me the most," Elizabeth wrote in her reflection journal.*

*"This week I lernd to finger tapping more oftin," Oscar shared in his reflective journal.*

*"This week i lrend finger tapping becuse it hleps me sound out wrods easer," Nick shared.*



## Scene 7: Practice Makes Perfect

### Reader's Theater

One way to get reluctant readers to read is to make it fun (Appendix U). Once a trimester, my students participated in a reader's theater production. Each group previewed and voted on the play they wanted to perform. Performances were by invitation only, and most of my students did not want to invite anyone! Each day, students practiced their reading and did not even realize it. They learned new vocabulary, how to decode new words, and fluency. It was important for my students to understand what fluency was so they knew how to get better at it. At the end of the week, the student put on the play with their group. Students could bring in props or make posters at home if they wanted to add to their play. Otherwise it was mostly improv. This activity improved their fluency and increased their interest and motivation. It also improved their self-confidence. They were very proud of what they accomplished. In fact, here is what the students had to say about Reader's Theater:

*"I think I want to try out for the play in high school." Dan told me.*

*"Someday, I'm going to Hollywood" Jake elaborated with gestures.*

*"I want to sign up for drama club," Keith told me excitedly.*

*"I think reader's theater helped me with reading because I learn new words" Ricardo shared in his reflective journal.*

*"I think Reader's Theater helped me with read because I kept saying rae breath instead of rye bread," Mallory shared in her reflective journal.*

*"I think reader's theater help me with reading because reading smoothly" Dan shared in his reflective journal.*

*"I liked everything oudut reads ther," Nick shared in his reflective journal.*

### **Characterization**

In order for students to perform Reader's Theater, I told them they had to "get into character". In order to do so, they had to research their part and act like that person would act. I modeled several different roles to show them what to do. The results were fantastic! Henny Penny, aka Kate, walked and talked like a chicken. Irma, aka Mallory, was a natural on stage and hammed up her part as the restaurant owner. Oscar wins an academy award for his earth shaking burp! After practicing lines over and over he finally got the word sauerkraut. Nick amazed me with his rendition of Sammy the Snake. He sssssounded like a snake when he read his lines! His outfit even matched his snake on the day of our final performance! Ashlynn turned into a real monster and had a great cackle! What I learned from characterization is that students had to fully understand what they were reading to get into character, so reader's theater was also building comprehension and higher levels of thinking.

### **Bloopers**

As with any type of acting, there are bound to be bloopers. We definitely had our share. Colby got so excited he threw up outside of my door. Ricardo was so nervous he stuttered and had a hard time delivering his lines. Dan could not handle the freedom of the open stage and ran in circles not knowing which way to run first. Keith said his lines so fast that, no one could understand him. Oscar could not say sauerkraut for the life of him. Ashlynn ripped her dress right up the back. The bloopers reminded my students that they were all human and all going to make mistakes so they laughed with each other rather than at each other. Most importantly they had to learn to work together and be prepared so they did not let their cast mates down.

### **Oral Reading Fluency**

Readers Theater was a great opportunity for me to listen to my students read. I used the script to mark a running record during practice. I took anecdotal notes to remind myself how to help each of my students. It provided me with a wealth of information and my students had fun while I was collecting it.

### **No Speeding Zone**

"My teacher told me to read as fast as I could," Colby told me.

"Why?," I asked.

"Because I was timed and I had to read fast," he explained.



Upon hearing this the first few weeks of school, I quickly established a no speeding zone in my classroom and on stage. Colby was not the only student to share this information with me and I found it quite upsetting. At that point, I explained what fluency was and how reading fast was a product of understanding how to perform other skills, such as decoding, phrasing, using intonation and expression, and reading accurately. I reminded my students that if they read fast on stage, they would not know what they read and the audience and cast members would not be able to understand them. Keith tried to use another voice, but we could not understand him. This turned out to be a valuable lesson for all of my students.

### **Echo Reading**

An important skill to teach struggling readers is echo reading. Children can mimic or copy the phrasing, intonation and expression of the other person's voice. My students practiced this weekly with a parent and/or with me. It really made a change in how they read their sentences. I was surprised to hear how difficult intonation, phrasing and expression was for my students when their everyday speech did not suffer the same demise. This opened my eyes to breaking down fluency into the components beyond speed and accuracy. Echo reading helped my students by giving them an opportunity to hear what a good reader sounded like.

## Partner Reading

As an activity to build fluency, my students read with a partner. Some partners were struggling fifth and sixth grader readers. It gave them a chance to show off what they had worked so hard to learn. Partners read to each other and reminded each other of strategies to use when they did not know a word. When students had to teach it to other students, it helped them internalize the strategies even more so than practicing them independently.

## Poetry: Alliteration

One skill that prepares students for reading is phonemic awareness. Orally being able to play with words helps students to transfer what they hear orally to what they see in writing. Poetry is a wonderful genre for practicing word play and phrasing. It's also fun for students to create poems of their own. I found that some of my students could not play with words or rhyme. I designed lessons using poetry to teach word play and rhyming. One activity we did was alliteration.



*Jump for Jam  
I love Jump for Jam*

*Allie Allie bumblee sall a apple bee*



*Pop pop Peter popped the pop corn*

*My jujugle jug can jigle but  
my jujugle jug broak  
no more jujugle jugy*





*That silly silly tyler try to  
take a tickler tiger  
but no more silly silly tyler*

My students had difficulty making sense of what they wrote. Creating alliteration required students to select a repeating letter, select the words for the pattern, and make sense of what they wrote. I started with great intentions, but quickly realized they could only focus on one task at a time. This indicates the importance of children being able to play with words orally, prior to learning how to read and write. Children who have a strong sense of rhyming and word play prior to learning how to read and write, will be able to make connections more easily than children who do not.

When my students were given the choice to write another poem or read poetry, the group was divided. Half chose to write poetry with alliteration and the other half chose to read it. This showed me where they were in the development of their thinking and which helped me plan for future lessons to stretch my reluctant writers.

### **Repeated Reading**

My students used the strategy of repeated reading to improve their fluency. They used a variety of different types of reading materials to practice their reading including poetry, reader's theater scripts, leveled readers, and authentic literature. Students began each week with a cold read and ended each



week with a hot read. Each week my students focused on a different fluency skill, phrasing, expression, intonation, and stopping at punctuation. The emphasis on rate was placed on accuracy and understanding, not rapid calling words. When reading was accurate, reading was more fluent and meaningful. My students evaluated their fluency with a fluency rubric (Appendix V). Ironically, they also began to share how they evaluated their parents' reading. One day Mallory came in with this story:

"My dad hates to echo read," Mallory told me.

"Why," I asked.

"He is terrible at it. His fluency is very choppy," Mallory explained.

"Well it's good he has you to help him then," I told her. She had the biggest smile on her face and set out with a new purpose for reading. She was going to help her father.

### **Therapy Dogs**

Every trimester I have arranged for my students to read to therapy dogs. Even though our focus was reading fluency, this was highly motivational for my students. They had to have twenty-eight stickers to participate, which meant they had to read twenty-eight times at home with a parent.

The week the Therapy dogs were to visit, the weather took a turn for the worst and the Halloween Parade had to be changed to Friday, Therapy Dog Day. My students were very upset to say the least.

"Mrs. Thomas, I would rather visit with the Therapy Dogs than have the parade and party. Could you ask the principal if we could do that?" Keith asked sincerely.

Another student, Joey, went up to the picture of the dogs and pet the picture when he found out they were not coming until the following week.

When the day for the Therapy Dogs to visit finally arrived, my students were chattering with excitement. They selected a "Just Right" book at the beginning of the week to read to the dogs and practiced every day. Each student had a turn to read his/her book to a Therapy Dog. There were three German Sheppard dogs all together, Echo, Flossy, and Whimsy. Echo, a pup, was in training. The day was special to all of my students.

Working with Therapy Dogs was very rewarding. They listened without opinion, loved the attention, and never complained. For some of my students, reading every night at home was a huge accomplishment. The Therapy Dogs motivated them to read.



**Figure 4.21. Echo likes to read and eat hair!**



**Figure 4.22. Students earn time to read with the Therapy Dogs.**



**Figure 4.23. Flossy the Therapy dog.**

"I liked the job visiting because they were nice and they were listening and sleeping. I think the dog helped me read by listening to me," Kate shared in her journal.

"The book I read to them was a good book about a dog. The one dog put his head on me!" Samantha wrote in her journal.

"I think reading to the therapy dogs increased my reading to the next level." Molly told me.

"My favorite memory was reading to the dogs," Keith wrote in his journal.

"The dogs motivated my reading my book," Andrew told me.

"The therapy dogs helped me by making me excited to read," Oscar wrote.

### **Scene 8: I can read the words, but what did I read?**

For struggling readers, comprehension is a difficult concept if the book is not on their level. Older struggling readers can practice comprehension strategies if they are met at their instructional reading level. Here are the comprehension strategies I used with my struggling readers and their reactions to them. The hope

is that my students will someday be able to do their thinking in their head, but for now they had to make it visible so I could see how they were thinking.

### **Making Connections**

To get my students to make connections to the text they were reading, they used a graphic organizer and leveled reader (Appendix W). After modeling what to do and giving examples, I had students practice making connections on a graphic organizer with the book they were reading. The format used was text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world. This helped to build their background knowledge and connect with the text.

*"This book reminds me of the time I went to the Houston Space seter," Drake wrote.*

*"This book reminds me of the book called "The First Day I got my Backpack," Holly shared.*

*"This book reminds me of a real project, Christopher's Project. It was like Leticia's project in my book," Samantha wrote.*

### **Asking Questions**

Asking questions turned out to be one of the easier comprehension skills for my students. Once it was modeled and practiced, my students asked questions in their leveled readers. I liked that they had to think while they were reading so they could come up with a question. They did not realize this was helping to monitor their comprehension. They continued practicing independently by asking

questions in their leveled readers. Each time they practiced this skill, their questions became stronger.

## Visualization



Visualization is a very misleading title for this skill. Not only do students have to picture what the scene in a book may look like, but they also needed to gather evidence about what they heard, smelled, felt, and maybe even tasted in a scene. Authors write with the five senses, called imagery, to make the reader feel as if they are in the story. After sharing many examples and modeling, I had my students try to find where the author used visualization in their leveled readers and authentic literature. I told them they were detectives on a secret mission. They used the codes above to mark their visualizations in their books. Before the end of class, they shared what they visualized (Appendix X).

*"It's like a movie playing in my head," Ashlynn commented.*

*"I smelled the hospital and fear when I read my book. The boy had asthma and had to go to the hospital" Elizabeth explained.*

*"When I read my book, I was at a baseball game. I heard the crowd cheer, smelled and tasted peanuts, and felt a foam finger poke me" Colby told us.*

*"My book was about Prairie Dogs. I heard the birds squawking on a summer day, smelled the fresh air, felt the sun on my fur, and saw prairies with wild flowers and grass" Keith shared.*

I was blown away by their responses! It was amazing that my struggling readers could communicate this language to me. Their senses and experiences must have triggered the vocabulary. When they were given a book on their level they were able to learn higher order thinking because they were not spending all of their energy decoding words. Later, I explained to them the best part about reading a book was that they could direct their own movie, not watch someone else's idea of how the movie should look.

### **Inferencing/Drawing Conclusions**

Inferencing or drawing conclusions was difficult for my students. Struggling readers are behind in the development of their thinking skills. Inferential thinking required my students to move beyond the literal or right there questions to adding up clues to draw a conclusion. This skill took a great deal of modeling and scaffolding before my students could actually practice it. One of the best ways to explicitly teach this skill is through a read aloud. I modeled my thinking and then asked my students what they thought. I had them expand their thinking by leading them toward the inference. One book I read to my students that provided many opportunities for inferential thinking was *Henry's Freedom Box* by Ellen Levine and Kadir Nelson. I explained when they read, they had to

read like a writer. In writing class, they were taught show don't tell. I told them to take this skill and use it to figure out what the author was trying to show them because he could not tell them. When drawing conclusions was described in this way, and then practiced with guidance, they began to understand. One-by-one I could see my students connect with what I had explained to them. As an exit ticket to leave my class, I gave them clues in a story and they had to draw a conclusion to leave. The students were so excited to try to draw a conclusion that they were jumping up and down!

### **Determining importance**

Determining importance is always difficult for struggling readers. To them, it all looks important. To show them how to decide what information is important, I modeled reading a page from the book *Sally Ride*, a leveled reader. After I read each sentence I asked them if there was anything of importance to write on the board. We discussed their answers and which responses were important. At the end of the page, I explained that I could use what I wrote for a number of other uses. I showed them how to use it to write a summary, study for a test, and as a reminder of what they read. I also explained this was a skill they could use all through junior high, high school and college when reading school text books.

Then I had my students take out their leveled readers. Since I only had five to six students in a group, each student took a turn to read until they came to

something important. The rest of the group had to raise their hand when they thought they heard something important. We stopped and the person or persons who raised their hand(s) told the group what was important to write down. There were mistakes, but we discussed why a fact was important or not. The person who read, wrote down what was important and then we moved to the next person. This worked well because they helped each other and heard different types of genres as well as fiction and nonfiction. Finally, I had the students try it independently. I walked around and assisted where needed. Elizabeth, who has trouble with comprehension, wrote down words that were of no importance. I showed her what to do again and she got it. I am hoping this will help with her comprehension as well.

### **Summarizing**

Retelling what was read in words or summarizing in writing is also difficult for struggling readers to do. To make the process easier, I modified a FAB Five Summary guide for fiction and nonfiction books (Appendix Y). These outlines guided my students through the steps to creating a summary. Throughout the study, my students wrote summaries of both fiction and nonfiction books. What they did not realize, was they were self-monitoring as they read. Writing a summary involves higher order thinking: inferring, determining importance, self-monitoring, and summarizing. My students had to write summaries of their leveled readers for independent practice.



The main character are birds of prey they are  
Many Kinds of Birds of prey, the main character  
wants Food, there are many things that can  
get in the way of the Birds Finding Food, the  
Weather Food chain, <sup>and</sup> environment, get in their  
way of finding food, they try to open  
it there in environment, a fact of birds of prey  
bird you know

Figure 4.24. Sample of a student summary.

### Scene 9: Finding the Way



*Morris began to read the books he repaired and found he couldn't put them down. Days went by where Morris couldn't be found. Where was he you may ask? He was lost in a book.*

"What does getting lost in a book mean again?" Oscar asked.

"It means the book is so good that you don't want to stop reading,"

I explained.

"Has that ever happened to you before?" I asked the group. At first, no one replied. To break the silence, I shared a time I was lost in a book and could not put it down. This was something we definitely had to work on this year.

As the study progressed, my students would come up to me and say, "Hey Mrs. Thomas, I got lost in a book!" They could not wait to share their book with me. Nick even stopped me in the hallway to tell me about the book he selected at the library by using what he had learned in my class.

The excitement over getting lost in a book was becoming contagious! Each week, I had my students share the book they read in a book talk format.

Ricardo asked, "Oh, what level is that? I think I'll read that one next week."

"Oh, I read that book. It was really good," Oscar shared.

This was just one of many similar conversations. My students were recommending books to each other and planning what books they wanted to read next. It was amazing!



**Figure 4.25. Morris found a “Just Right” book for everyone!**

*In fact, Morris was enjoying reading so much he began to hand out books to anyone who stopped by. He quickly realized there were all types of books for all types of people and everyone could find a book they liked.*

As my students began to read more books on their level, they started to realize just how interesting books could be. At first, they were reluctant to try a new genre, but now the leveled printable books piqued their interest just enough to make them want to find more books about the topic. The leveled books even come in a series. Once I showed this to my students, they were requesting books for the following week! Then I showed them authentic books on their level were in series as well. I felt like Morris trying to find the perfect book for each of my students. In the end, it was time well spent. My students were excited about what they were reading!

### **Scene 10: The Reading and Writing Connection**

Good writers read and good readers write. The two skills go hand-in-hand. Students learn about their writing by reading works by great authors. They hear the cadence of the words, visualize the movie playing in their head and become the character in the story. To help my students become more aware of

their writing, I had them use one of the same skills to write as they did to read, visualization. Of course, I had to get into character first.

I flew in on my broom wearing a black cape and witch's hat. The ooh's and ahh's were soon followed by the distant sounds of screaming. The lights were turned low and the caldron was aglow. The spirits danced as shadows up above. It was Halloween Eve and the stage was set for the best Scariest Stories yet! The children listened and cried and their eyes grew open wide as they heard the sounds of the dead, "Clinkity-clink, clinkity-clink".

Suddenly, but not soon enough, the story came to a dreadful end. The dead woman had come back from the grave to retrieve her greatest treasure. The little old coins in the tin can sang "Clinkity-clink, clinkity-clink" which gave the greatest pleasure. The thief, who stole the coins from the little old ladies hands, was found dead in his home lying by the pots and pans.

"Can you visualize it now?" I had to ask, waiting for the dams to burst.

Little Mallory trembled and stuttered, "I was so scared; I could taste it in my mouth!"

"Yes!" I yelled, causing my students to jump. "Now we are going to take what you just heard and put it into words."

My students began writing what they heard, smelled, tasted, felt and saw. Then I had them plot their own story using those visualizations. They started with where and when the story was taking place and then gradually began making a list

of characters. In the meantime, my students realized they had to come up with a problem, just like the character in the story. Finally, I reminded them that they needed a climax and resolution. We discussed the plot features in the story we had just read and then they wrote a climax and resolution of their own stories. Before they realized it, they had plotted a story. At the end of class, they shared the stories they plotted.

The following day, my students wrote vivaciously. They could not get their thoughts down on paper fast enough. All I could hear was the sound of pencil meeting paper. Once their stories had told themselves, the room slowly came back to life. My students were amazed by what they wrote. Their stories gave me goose bumps, but not of the scary kind. My struggling readers and writers had sculpted stories for the very first time.

## Act III: All together Now!

### Scene 1: Seasons Change

*The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore*  
by William Joyce.



Figure 4.26. Soon it became Fall...

*As the seasons changed, Morris grew older and soon the books had to take care of him the way he had taken care of them.*

As my study progressed, I had to adapt and adjust to the needs of my students. I faced many challenges along the way. At the end of each day, I kept reminding myself to focus on meeting my students where they were in their reading development, not where they should be. The pressure of standardized tests and student achievement is overwhelming. The funding for my program is literally based on each student's achievement. I was beginning to understand how

they felt about the testing. I repeated my mantra daily, "focus on the kids" and "meet them where they are," to keep from panicking.

## **Scene 2: What Do I Do When I Don't know a Word?**

Providing my students with a tool box of strategies to use when their meaning broke down was an important part of my study. One tool I gave to my students was a book mark to guide them through the thinking process when they got to a word they did not know. First, the strategies were explicitly taught and modeled. Then my students practiced the strategies with me. They marked the number of the strategy next to where they used it in their leveled reader. Then they kept a tally of every time they used a strategy. When students were finished, they looked over all of the strategies they used and did not use. Finally, they reflected upon their strategy use. Here is a glimpse of what my students did (Appendix Z).

### **Look at the pictures**

Using picture clues to figure out words can be very helpful. Joey made this discover when he was stuck on the word inhaler.

"Mrs. Thomas, I don't know this word. What is it?" Joey asked.

"Well, before I tell you, let's try some other strategies first. What is the first strategy you should try?" I asked.

"Look at the pictures," he responded.

"Let's reread the sentence and then look at the picture," I suggested.

Joey read the sentence leaving a blank for the unknown word.

"Now look at the picture. Do you see anything that might help you?" I asked.

"Yes, she is using an inhaler in the picture and the beginning of the word is in," he answered excitedly.

"Good, now let's see if the rest of the word matches up," I reminded him.

Sure enough, the remainder of the word matched the pronunciation. It was the perfect opportunity to show a struggling reader that they can figure a word out.

### **Sound or Tap out the word**

Students learned how to tap phonetic words they were reading, but they also learned how to tap what they wrote to see if they spelled the word correctly. Using both decoding and encoding, students gained a better understanding of word structure and strategies for figuring out unknown words. To practice, students wrote a phonetic word based on the phonics skill we were learning that week and then had to tap it out after they wrote it. Each sound received one tap. I reminded them to tap what they heard, not what they wrote. It took practice, but they finally started to realize they were tapping what they wrote, not what they heard. Soon they were correcting their own mistakes.

### **Look for a smaller word within the word**



Throughout the semester, students had been learning sounds that parts of words could make. Some examples were digraphs and welded sounds. When they knew what sound a chunk of letters made, it made decoding easier. Students also learned how to break words into syllables and then look for smaller sounds within a bigger sound. We used the same concept with affixes.

Elizabeth told me, "Mrs. Thomas, I had a science test and there was a big word I did not know. I divided it up into syllable and sounded it out. Guess what? I figured it out! It was condensation!"

"Yes! That is exactly what you do when you get stuck on a word!" I told her. She was so proud of herself! It was priceless.

### **Skip the Word and Read the Sentence to the End**

Reading the sentence and replacing the word with a blank helps students to think of other words that might fit. Then they can ask themselves what word sounds similar to the one they don't know and would fit in the sentence.

### **What word would make sense?**

At this point, readers need to be flexible and try different based on their meaning and beginning sounds. Once students think they have figured out a word, they need to plug it in to see if it works. If it does not, then they need to try another word. This is similar to doing a puzzle.

"This week I learned to put another word in for another words place," Ricardo shared in his journal.

### **Use the words around it**

Context clues help a reader figure out the unknown word by adding meaning to the sentence. We practiced finding context clues and tied this in with drawing conclusions. Every time students found a context clue, we recorded it. At the end of the sentence or paragraph, we added up the clues to draw a conclusion. Sometimes it was figuring out a word, and other times it helped to figure out what was happening in the story. Students marked clues in their books with a picture of a magnifying glass.

### **Reread the sentence with the word. Does it sound right? Does it make sense?**

Take the word you think it is and reread the sentence with the word you think it is. Does it sound right? Does it make sense? If not, try another word using letter clues and context clues.

"I learned how to reread and think. It helps me out a lot when I am reading," Elizabeth wrote in her journal.

### **Ask a friend or an adult**

After all of the above strategies have been tried, and the word is still unknown, then it is time to ask for help. Remind students to use this strategy as a last resort though. My students wanted to ask first and then try a strategy. The more my students figured out on their own, the stronger their skills became. This bookmark helped to guide my students through the thinking process.

**Look in the dictionary or use an electronic device like dictionary.com**

Struggling readers are easily frustrated by dictionaries. One tool I used with my students was dictionary.com. Not only did it tell them the meaning, antonyms and synonyms, it also pronounced the word for them. Kindles and Nooks also have this feature. This is a tool struggling readers need to know how to use.

After keeping a tally mark of each strategy used, the students added up their tallies and reflected on the strategies they used the most and least. Here was what my students had to say about it.

**Oscar:** Looking at the sounds and using a dictionary helped me to understand the book. I will try to look for smaller words in bigger words next time.

**Ricardo:** Sound out words looking for smaller words in a word, and asking for help, helped me to figure words out easier. I should look at beginning and ending sounds, reread, use context clues and try to use different words in the sentences more often.

**Nick:** I broke words I didn't know in my story and tape out. I need to look and breaking up words I see in smaller words.

**Ashlynn:** The strategy that I used a lot is sound words out. I think I should use more of rereading because if I reread you can understand better.

**Keith:** I can sound out the word very well. I need to use words around it. I can find words that connect to it.

**Mallory:** I tapped the word out. And it helped me sound out the word. I should try to use other strategies, like look at the pictures, skip the word and read the sentence to the end, and put another word in its place to figure out unknown words.

We have a long way to go, but at least now my students are aware of what strategies they used and what strategies they need to practice.

### **Scene 3: What Do I Do When I Don't Understand?**

#### **Self-Monitoring**

Readers must stop and think about their reading when they read. Students who do not self-monitor need to be explicitly taught how to do so. This is not a skill that students will innately know how to do. It needs to be modeled and practiced. Not only does it require comprehension skills, it also requires students to actively think while they are reading. To help my students walk through the thinking process, I created a checklist of strategies on a bookmark.

In the beginning, my students had to stop at the end of every sentence and try to recall what they read. As they grew stronger at recalling a sentence, they progressed to a paragraph. It was important for me to start small so my students did not become confused or overwhelmed. They had to ask themselves to recall what they had read. If they could not recall what they read, they had to reread the sentence. If they still could not recall what they read, they had to try to find what was causing the problem for them. If it was a decoding or meaning issue, they had to go to their 'What to do if I don't know a word' tool to try to figure it out.

Self-monitoring helped to decrease the amount of misunderstandings my students had when they read. Whether they were not paying attention while

reading or the meaning was breaking down, self-monitoring helped my students catch themselves before they were too far lost. The following is the checklist my students followed:

### **Find your inner voice**

I modeled my inner voice when I read and when my meaning broke down. It was important to explicitly teach this because struggling readers often do not hear their inner voices. My students were fascinated with the fact that I talked to myself while I was reading. Then I had my students practice showing their inner voice to a partner. At first it was difficult, but it became more natural.

### **Identify where meaning breaks down**

Find the sentence or paragraph where your meaning breaks down. Mark it with a Post-it or question mark so you know where it is. Try another strategy.

### **Identify the problem**

Once the break down in understanding is located, then the student needs to figure out why. Is it a word or phrase that is confusing? Is the layout of the book confusing? The student must ask himself what is standing in the way of his understanding and mark it in his book.

### **Decide what fix-it strategy to use**

There are many fix-it strategies that overlap with phonics, comprehension and decoding. It is important for struggling readers to learn how to use the important ones and not bog them down with too many strategies at one time,

which is overwhelming. My students used the strategies on the book mark for "What do you do when you Don't know a Word?" from the previous section. There was a good balance of decoding and comprehension strategies that forced my students to think about their reading.

Some of the strategies for figuring out a word overlap into metacognitive thinking. Learning phonics in isolation and without thinking and drawing conclusions in real literature will result in repeated failure. This is why it is so important to teach phonics and comprehension using metacognition and authentic literature with older struggling readers. Students need to understand why they are learning what they are learning, it needs to be on their level, and it needs to be meaningful.

#### **Scene 4: Making Thinking Visible with Text Coding**

At this point in my study, I still felt as if I was not digging deep enough into my students' thinking. I needed some way make my students thinking visible when they read so I could clarify any misconceptions they were having. My first attempt at this was answering metacognitive questions. This did not work because it was too difficult for my students to verbalize and write their thoughts. So I went back to the proverbial drawing board and I created a coding system of some of the key strategies we had practiced involving metacognition (Appendix AA). The codes were asking questions, rereading, stop and think, look for clues, tap it out, and making connections. They used this coding system to

mark their leveled reader during reading. All they had to do was draw a symbol as opposed to verbalizing actual words. This worked much better.

After everyone completed the coding, the students and I analyzed the strategies they used. First, they kept a tally chart of how many times they used each strategy. Then they recorded which strategies they used the most and least. Finally, they reflected on the strategies they used and did not use and came up with a plan for using the less commonly used strategies. In the last step of the process, the students recorded their results on the class tally chart. The students examined the strategies they used the most and least. Then the students shared ways to get better at each of the strategies. The reflection made the experience more meaningful and valuable to my students and helped me plan for future lessons.

	4-3	?	(R)	💡	🔑	🖐️	📊
Ricardo		-	1		1		
Oscar							
Dan						1	
Mallory							
Nick							
	38	19	23	5	11	18	

Figure 4.27. Making Thinking Visual

## Scene 5: A Season Comes to an End



**Figure 4.28.** ...and then winter.

*Just as the leaves on the tress fall to the ground and new ones grow again the next year, the seasons change. People, like trees, start out as weak saplings, but grow up to be big and strong. Morris' figured out that his writing became stronger through his reading.*

Teaching students to read is the reciprocal of teaching students to write. It is critical to the development of their thinking. In writing, my students were taught show, don't tell. In reading, my students were expected to find what the author was telling the reader through the character's actions. Morris Lessmore became a better writer because he read the works of other writers. He became a better reader because he wrote about his experiences and what he read. This message helped my struggling readers see the overall plan the author has for the reader so the readers can make sense of what they read.





**Figure 4.29. One day Morris knew it was time to go.**


*One day, Morris finished the book he was writing. He knew then it was time for him to go. The books were upset, but they knew. As Morris made his way to the door, he turned to say good bye to his very dear friends. "I'll remember you always," he told them and turned to walk into the light.*

Slowly but surely, I started to see progress. My students were beginning to view decoding, fluency and comprehension through a new lens. Using decoding and word meaning strategies with metacognition bridged the phonics, fluency and comprehension.


By explicitly teaching my students all of the layers of reading, they began to realize it was complicated and was going to take practice, like a sport or learning an instrument. It's a long process and I realized for every two steps we took forward, we took one step back, but that was all right because we were still moving forward.

## Scene 6: Look How We Grew!

### Running Record

 **Dan:** Wow! What a difference four months makes! Dan went from a boy who hated reading to a young man who wanted to try out for the school play!

Dan has moved up to a level O, which is equivalent to January of third grade. This is almost a full year's growth in four months! He read 68 words per minute on this new level with 99% accuracy. His fluency went from one word at a time to two to three word phrases. He also is no longer having difficulty with tracking from one line to the next. He still has a long road ahead of him, but his gains are remarkable.

 **Nick:** Nick's robotic voice has diminished somewhat, however, he continues to read with a monotone voice. Multisyllabic words continue to be an area of weakness. His reading at the end of the study was definitely more confident than at the beginning of the study. Nick read 70 words in a minute with five miscues on level P. This is equivalent to end of the year third grade. Nick also struggles with letter reversals and phonological awareness. Nick is now showing evidence of using word attack strategies but does not catch his mistakes when he writes them, only when reading them. I will continue to work with Nick using explicit multisensory instruction to improve his reversals, decoding and comprehension.



**Oscar:** Oscar has blossomed into a reader. He moved from a level M to a level R (end to second grade to midyear fourth grade). Oscar continues to read with his finger to track each line. When he knows he is being timed, he tries to read too fast even though I remind him to read at a rate like he is speaking. Oscar also reverses letters and the word order of a sentence. The frequency has decreased; however, I am still concerned. Oscar is very bright and if you look at his scores, he is proficient. The scores do not reflect the reversals because he can read enough to get the gist of the story by using his comprehension and reasoning skills to draw conclusions. On comprehension tests in the classroom, he is proficient.



**Holly:** Holly is perplexing. I have been working with her classroom teacher and special education teacher to try to come up with plan for the best way to help her. I was recently informed there is a family history of dyslexia. Holly does not reverse letters, however, has a difficult time sounding words out in the sequence which they appear. At the beginning of the year, Holly read 39 words in a minute and her accuracy was 96% on level N. Four months later, she is still on level N but did increase her accuracy to 97% and words per minute to 49. She had a difficult time focusing when answering the comprehension questions. Her retell only included a few important facts. Holly needed prompting when

answering the comprehension questions. Her teachers and I are very concerned about her lack of progress in the classroom. I will continue to work with Holly using explicit multisensory instruction.



**Drake:** Drake began the year at an independent level of N and is now reading at level O. This is equivalent to January/March of third grade. He read 75 words with 95% accuracy. Drake tries to read with expression in two word phrases, with an occasional three or four word phrase. His retell of a story improved since the beginning of the year, however, he still does not want to make the effort to look back in the story to clarify his answers. Drake will continue to work on decoding and fluency within authentic literature.



**Joey:** Joey's effort to complete his work comes in spurts. He continues to struggle with decoding and fluency. Joey read independently on level N at the beginning of the study. He read 88 words per minute with 100% accuracy. Joey's retell included some of the important facts and his comprehension of literal and inferential questions was 100%. Joey is now working on level O, but N is his independent reading level. I will continue to work with Joey using explicit multisensory instruction to improve his decoding and comprehension. The RtII team is sending him to be evaluated to see if he qualifies as learning disabled.



**Ricardo:** Ricardo was nervous when reading and repeated some of the words. As a result, his reading was very choppy and slow. It takes him time to gather his thoughts and then say what is on his mind. Sometimes it sounds like a stutter, but it is not consistent. I asked the speech teacher to listen to him talk. His reading is now on level P, which is equivalent to June of third grade, placing him a half of a year below grade level. Ironically, he scored proficient on the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) which measures comprehension. He read 51 words per minute with 97% accuracy. He also has difficulty tracking sentences. Ricardo could retell the facts of the story and answer literal questions, but he struggled with character feelings and body language. Ricardo will continue working on fluency.



**Heather:** Heather is a very hard worker and motivated. She has difficulty with decoding and fluency. Ironically, her comprehension is strong. Heather had an independent reading level of N which is equivalent to November of third grade. Her rate was 70 words per minute with 99% accuracy on the first 100 words. Her miscues after that affected the meaning of the story. Heather's retell was strong and included important details. I had to focus her instruction on decoding and fluency strategies. Heather also has difficulty pushing her voice out, and received speech in the lower grades. I asked the speech teacher to listen

to her read to ease my mind. Projecting her voice was also something we will continue to practice.



**Kate:** Kate is very impulsive and has a difficult time following directions. As a result, learning new strategies is challenging for her. Kate moved from a level N in the fall to a P at the end of the study. This places her reading level at the end of third grade. Kate read 62 words in a minute with 93% accuracy. She made seven meaning changing miscues and will continue on this level for another six weeks to build her fluency and accuracy. Kate is good at reading character body language and can fill in the blanks when she is reading. Her comprehension is at 100%, even though her words per minute and accuracy were so low. I will continue working on decoding and fluency with Kate.



**Mallory:** Mallory moved from a level O to a level Q in reading. This places her at November of fourth grade. She read 67 words per minute with 97% accuracy and used her finger to track the words. Her retell lacked important details, yet she was able to answer questions with prompting. Mallory will continue at level Q to work on her fluency.



**Samantha:** Samantha moved from a level N to a Q. This places her at November of fourth grade. She read 86 words per minute with 97% accuracy. Samantha continues to use her finger to track her sentences. She did show

evidence of self-correcting and using word attack strategies when she did not know a word. The retell is only partially correct and her comprehension is at 75%. Samantha will continue to work on her decoding and fluency.



**Andrew:** Andrew moved from a level N to a level P which is equivalent to June of third grade. He read 83 words per minute with 97% accuracy. His retell did not include some of the important facts and he needed to use look backs. Andrew's comprehension is at 86% with look backs. Andrew will continue to work on decoding, fluency and comprehension.



**Colby:** Colby began the study at level O and ended the study at level Q. He read 90 words per minute with 98% accuracy. This is equivalent to November of fourth grade. Colby read roughly in two to three word phrases. He needs to apply word attack strategies when he does not know a word. He reverts back to old habits and guesses. During the retell, when Colby did not remember what had happened in the story, he guessed and made up the rest of the story. When answering prompted questions, Colby was able to figure out the answer to another question by the wording of the first question. When I asked him to clarify his answer, the facts were incorrect. Colby will continue to work on fluency and comprehension.



**Keith:** Keith began the study on level M and ended the study on level N.

This level is equivalent to November of third grade. Keith struggles with speech and the letter/sound system. He does show evidence of self-correcting. Keith's retell lacked important details, yet when prompted with questions was able to answer them with 86% accuracy. Keith will continue to work on decoding, fluency, and comprehension.



**Ashlynn:** Ashlynn began the study at level P and ended the study on level

R, which is equivalent to March of fourth grade. She is now proficient. Ashlynn struggles with speech and the letter/sound system. She also leaves off the endings of words, especially suffixes. Her reading is very choppy. Ashlynn's retell lacked important details but she answered the comprehension questions with 75% accuracy. Ashlynn will continue to work on decoding sounds and fluency.



**Elizabeth:** Elizabeth began the study on level N. She read 57 words per

minute with 96% accuracy. This placed her reading level at November of third grade. She is now reading on level P, which is equivalent to June of third grade. Her oral reading rate is 69 words per minute with 96% accuracy. Elizabeth continues to use her finger when reading. Her retell included some of the important facts, however, some information was incorrect. When prompted with comprehension questions, she was able to answer them with 50% accuracy.



Elizabeth struggles with inferential questions. We will continue to work on decoding, fluency and comprehension for the remainder of the school year.



**Molly:** Molly began the study on level M, which was equivalent to September of third grade. She is now reading at level N. This is equivalent to November of third grade. Her oral reading rate was 73 words per minute with 98% accuracy. Molly reads with her finger and needs to continue working on tracking and sweeping during reading. She had a very difficult time with her retell, however, when prompted with questions she answered with 100% accuracy. Molly will continue to work on tracking, fluency and summarizing.



**Figure 4.30.** The cycle begins again...

*As Morris walked into the light, he was lifted into the sky by books he loved so much. But one story had yet to be told, the book he had written. So it fluttered to the ground, waiting for the next reluctant reader to come to town.*

## Scene 7: Garfield Reading Attitude Survey

After collecting the post reading assessments, I also collected a post-Garfield Reading Attitude Survey. The results from the pre and post-Garfield Survey reflected my students' reading attitudes for recreational and academic reading after the study. The students showed growth in their reading attitudes in all but one area. Here is a highlight of the remarkable results.

*How do you feel about starting a new book?*

Prior to the study, my students were very hesitant to start a new book. I suspect it was because they did not know how to choose a "Just Right" book. The results of the survey indicate my students are much happier about selecting a new book after the study rather than prior to the study.



*How do you feel about reading instead of playing?*

The average score of the post survey increased, indicating student were more likely to read for fun instead of playing after the study than they did prior to the study. This indicates my students are finding reading more enjoyable now than prior to the study.

*How do you feel about reading in school?*

One of the most remarkable changes I noticed was the improvement of my students' attitudes about reading in school.

Prior to the study, students were mildly upset about reading in school. After the study, students were much happier about reading in school. I was pleased to see my program has given my students a much better perspective of reading.

*How do you feel about learning from a book?*

Prior to my study, my students did not have a positive attitude about learning from a book. I suspect the books were too difficult to read and were very intimidating. As they have gained confidence and a tool box of strategies to use, their attitude about learning from what they are reading is improving.

*How do you feel when it's time for reading in school?*

At the beginning of my study, my students did not want to come to Title I Reading because they were missing a special to get extra help. To be honest, I cannot blame them. By the end the study, my students indicated they were happy to attend reading class. I believe their attitudes improved for two reasons. First, they used multisensory activities with rewards to learn how to become better readers. Second, because they now realize this is helping them to get better at reading, not to punish them. For either reason, I am thrilled.

The one area my students did not show growth was how they felt about reading school books, such as reading, social studies, math and science. I suspect their attitudes did not improve in this area because the books are difficult to read and they do not get to choose them.

### Scene 8: Reading Life Interview

To follow up with the pre-Reading Life Interview, I performed a post Reading Life Interview. I was hoping to see improvement in my students' attitudes about reading and an increase in the time they spent reading. Here is what they had to say after my study.



**Dan:** "I like reading because I got better at it. I like reading because I challenge myself. I like to read in my bedroom because no one bothers me. Sports Illustrated is my favorite magazine. I read when I have free time for about 20 minutes. Interesting books keep me reading."



**Nick:** "I think reading is good. I only like non-fiction books. I read everywhere. My favorite book is *My Side of the Mountain*. I only read on a Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. I read if it is interesting."



**Oscar:** "I like reading because it is educational. I like reading because you can imagine you are in the book. I like to read in my bedroom. My favorite book is *Origami Yoda*. I read every night. My mom keeps me reading."



**Holly:** "Reading is good because it is fun. I like to read in my bed or on the couch. My favorite series is *American Girl*. I read for one hour every day. I like to read scary books."



**Drake:** "I feel good about reading compared to the beginning of the year. I like reading because you can be different people. I like to read in my bed. *Lego* magazines are my favorite thing to read. I do not read often, but I do read my leveled reader. A cliff hanger keeps me reading."



**Joey:** "I like reading. I do not like going back to reread. I read in my room and at the table. My favorite series is *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. I read every before I go to bed. A good book keeps me reading."



**Ricardo:** "I feel ok about reading because I found some book that I like. I do like reading because I like different books. I do not have a favorite place to read. My favorite series is *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. I keep reading if the book is exciting."



**Heather:** "Sometimes reading makes me happy. I like to write stuff. I like to read when I'm bored. I sit in a comfy chair. I like to read chapter books. When I read, I stop at the next chapter. The summertime makes me want to read."



**Kate:** "I like reading more than I did. I read a lot more and I can read what I want. I read in my bedroom or on the couch. My favorite series is *Dear Dumb Diary*. I read for about an hour. I want to keep reading when the book leaves you hanging."



**Mallory:** "I feel good about reading. When I have nothing to do, I read. I do like to read because it is fun. I don't like to read when I am told to do it. I can read anywhere. My favorite series is the *Fudge* series. I read about four times a week. I want to keep reading when the book has laughter and excitement."



**Samantha:** "I feel good about reading. I can understand what I read and how I sound the words out. My favorite place to read is on the bed or couch. I like to read a variety of different books. I read every day for about 45 minutes."



**Andrew:** Andrew made huge improvements with his reading. In the pre interview, he hated reading. Here is what he thinks now: "I feel better about reading. I do not like to read out loud. I like to read in my head. I can read anywhere. My favorite series is *I Survived*. I like to read in the summer, during Title I and in my classroom. Interesting books keep me reading."



**Colby:** "I like reading because I get alone time from my brothers. I like it when I understand it. I like to read on the couch. Big Nate is my favorite series. I read five to ten minutes a day. I want to keep reading when the story is good."



**Keith:** "My famle reads. I like to find facts. I like to read in my bedroom. My favorite series is *Diry of a Wippy Kid*. I read for 20 minutes a day. I keep reading so I can lern facts."



**Ashlynn:** "I feel that reading is important to know because it will help you write. You can imagin that your in the book. My favorite series is *Dork Dairies*. I read every day for about 1 to2 hours. I keep reading if the books are good."



**Elizabeth:** "I like to read and feel good about it. I read in my free time. I like reading. It makes me happy when I am interested in a book. I don't like reading when the ending is sad or they don't make sense. I like to read in my bedroom because it is nice and quiet. I like *American Girl Doll* magazines and books. I read 20 minutes a day, six days a week. Interesting things in a book and learning keep me reading."



**Molly:** "I feel good about reading because it is cool. I like to read in my bedroom because it is quite. I like to read *Amarican Girl* magazines. I read once ina while. When I get "in the zone" I want to keep reading."

## Curtain Call

### Take a bow for your hard work



**Dan:** "My goal was to get better at reading. I did get better at reading by reading every day."



**Nick:** "My goal was more reading. I did reach my goal by reading over the weeking."



**Oscar:** "My goal was to **R**ead more **d**ooks. I did reach my goale **d**reading every night."



**Holly:** "My goal is I what to Get beter at Read. Read is still hard for me but I like it more now."



**Drake:** "My goal is to get better at reading. I need to read to get better."



**Joey:** "My goal was remebering what I read. I did reach my goal by wirting numbers next to the word."



**Ricardo:** "My goal was to get better at reading. I did reach my goal by lurning to do other spelling stetys (strategies)."



**Heather:** "My goal was I what to get beter at read. I did reach my goal by reading a lot."



**Kate:** "My goal was to read 50 books. I did not reach my goal because it was too much books."



**Mallory:** "I don't have a goal because I wasn't paying attention. My new goal is to pay attention."



**Samantha:** "My goal was to read 50 books. I did not reach my goal because that was a big goal."



**Andrew:** "My goal was to read 100 books. I did not reach my goal because I made it too big."



**Colby:** "My goal was to read more fluently (fluency). I reached my goal by reading more."



**Keith:** "My goal was to read more books. I did reach my goal by reading lots of more books. I did not reach my goal by reading books in my lexile range."



**Ashlynn:** "My goal was to read Nancy Drew. I met my goal and am now on chapter 2 of Nancy Drew."



**Elizabeth:** "My goal was to read more books. I reached my goal by doing the 1,000 pages."



**Molly:** My goal was to read 50 books. I did not reach my goal but I did read 23 books."



### **The End: The Curtain Closes**

The curtain may have closed, but the story is far from finished. The journey toward a life as readers has just begun for my students. More programs for struggling readers are needed to empower children and adults with the gift of reading.



**Figure 4.31. ...with another reluctant reader.**

*All of the sudden, the books heard a sound. When they looked up, they saw a girl standing in the doorway. She stared in disbelief as Morris Lessmore's book flew up to her and opened its pages. As the little girl began to read, the books breathed a sigh of relief. "And so our story ends as it began...with the opening of a book." by William Joyce.*

## **Chapter 5: Data Analysis**

### **Introduction**

The overall objective of my study was to close the widening gap for struggling readers. I tried to develop a balanced intervention program for teaching reading, rather than just focusing on one pillar of reading. Fourth grade is a critical time to catch struggling readers because by nine-years-old they are able to think critically and it is the last opportunity to close the gap before it widens beyond repair. To meet the needs of my students, I had to dig deeper into their thinking to help them connect the decoding to the comprehension rather than treat them separately. As the study progressed, the data grew exponentially. To avoid missing an important piece of evidence, the data were reflected upon daily. Once the study was complete, I analyzed the data to determine if I had in fact met my objective.

### **Scholastic Reading Inventory Analysis**

The first pre-assessment the students were given was the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) given at the end of third grade (Table 5.1). This assessment measures comprehension and is reported in Lexiles. These scores were divided into four categories, advanced, proficient, and basic and below basic. Students, who fell into the bottom 25% of the scores, were then given another screener to further determine where they were having difficulty in reading. These students were below basic in the reading comprehension, which

indicated issues with decoding and fluency. They were assessed with the CORE Phonics Survey (Table 5.2).

At the end of the study, the Title I students were given a post-assessment with the SRI. The results were significant. Table 5.1 indicates the growth each student made in Lexiles. 75 to 100 Lexile points is considered average growth for a full year. Since this study was only half of a year, the growth expectancy was 37.5-50 Lexile points. All of the students met this goal. The average gain of the students at the end of the study was 243 Lexiles per student. This is over double of what is expected for a fourth grade student. The ultimate goal is to have the fourth graders reach proficiency, which is a score of 600. The SRI score in Lexiles increases as the student gains understanding of what they read. This table indicates the teaching of metacognitive phonics and comprehension using multisensory activities improves the comprehension of struggling readers.

**Table 5.1. Scholastic Reading Inventory Results**

<b>Student Pseudonym</b>	<b>Before Study SRI Score</b>	<b>After Study SRI Score</b>
<b>Dan</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>569</b>
<b>Nick</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>446</b>
<b>Oscar</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>799</b>
<b>Holly</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>290</b>

<b>Drake</b>	<b>342</b>	<b>567</b>
<b>Ricardo</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>665</b>
<b>Heather</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>318</b>
<b>Kate</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>566</b>
<b>Mallory</b>	<b>468</b>	<b>609</b>
<b>Samantha</b>	<b>441</b>	<b>607</b>
<b>Andrew</b>	<b>310</b>	<b>599</b>
<b>Joey</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>271</b>
<b>Colby</b>	<b>298</b>	<b>389</b>
<b>Keith</b>	<b>295</b>	<b>517</b>
<b>Ashlynn</b>	<b>421</b>	<b>677</b>
<b>Elizabeth</b>	<b>391</b>	<b>608</b>
<b>Molly</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>446</b>

Note. 600 is proficient for fourth grade

**Negative Case Analysis.** Since all of the students met the mid-year gain of 37.5 to 50 Lexile point growth, there are not any negative cases to report.

### **Core Phonics Survey Analysis**

The CORE Phonics Survey was given to all incoming third grade students who fell below 25% on the pre-SRI assessment (Table 5.2). It assessed students in the area of letter identification, letter sounds, short vowels, consonant blends,

digraphs/trigraphs, r-controlled vowels, long vowel spellings, variant vowels, low frequency vowel and consonant spellings, and multisyllabic words. Scores were analyzed and rated as benchmark, strategic and intensive need. 207-212 was considered proficient and the student did not need this intervention. 142-206 was considered strategic. Students who scored 0-141 on the survey required intensive intervention; however, I did not have any students requiring this type of intervention. Students who scored 206 or above were placed in a Response to Intervention (RtII) intervention for their area of need and students who scored below 206 were placed in my tier three reading intervention groups. The phonics survey will be repeated at the end of the year, or sooner if needed, to determine if a student is ready to exit the program. Students must have a score of 206 to exit the program. This survey enabled me to see where their strengths and weaknesses in phonics were and helped me plan my lessons to meet their needs. My students needed to practice sounds, words, phrases, and sentences to build automaticity in their reading.

**Table 5.2. Core Phonics Survey- Beginning of the Year**

<b>Students' Pseudonyms</b>	<b>Survey Results</b>	<b>Need for Intervention</b>
<b>Dan</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>Strategic</b>
<b>Nick</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>Strategic</b>
<b>Oscar</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>Strategic</b>

<b>Holly</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>Strategic</b>
<b>Drake</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>Strategic</b>
<b>Joey</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>Strategic</b>
<b>Ricardo</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>Strategic</b>
<b>Heather</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>Strategic</b>
<b>Kate</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>Strategic</b>
<b>Mallory</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>Strategic</b>
<b>Samantha</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>Strategic</b>
<b>Andrew</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>Strategic</b>
<b>Colby</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>Strategic</b>
<b>Keith</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>Strategic</b>
<b>Ashlynn</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>Strategic</b>
<b>Elizabeth</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>Strategic</b>
<b>Molly</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>Strategic</b>

**Negative Case Analysis.** Since the CORE Phonics Survey will not be repeated until the end of the school year, there are not any negative cases to report at this time.

### **Running Record Analysis**

Students, who were placed in this tier three intervention group, were then pre-assessed with a Running Record provided by Columbia University's Teacher College and their Reading and Writing Project (Table 5.3). The Running Record provided a well-rounded view of a student's reading ability and their independent reading level by measuring rate, accuracy, fluency and comprehension. What this table does not indicate is comprehension and fluency. The Running Record also provided an opportunity to collect a retell. A student must fall within the proficiency range in rate, accuracy, comprehension and fluency to advance to the next level.

At the beginning of the program, the lowest reading level was L with a rate of 86 words per minute. At this point in time, P is considered proficient and the student must read this level at a rate of 90-125 words per minute. Students were taught phonics and comprehension skills through metacognition and then had to apply them to their independent level of reading. Students remained on a level for approximately six to eight weeks as recommended by the creator, Lucy Calkins. As students were ready to move to the next level, their rate, accuracy, and comprehension improved. By the middle of year, R is considered proficient and the student must read at a rate of 105-145 words per minute. The results indicate all but one student made growth in their reading level from the beginning of the study to the end; however no one reached proficiency (table 5.2.).

**Negative case analysis.** The student who did not make progress has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) already so her case manager and I had to come up with a plan to help her succeed. After digging deeper, reading more research, and working with the student one-on-one, we determined even more multisensory activities were needed to help her link what she learned in the short term memory into her long term memory. This intervention will begin after we return from winter break.

**Table 5.3. Running Record Independent Reading Levels**

<b>Students' Pseudonyms</b>	<b>Beginning of Year Level</b>	<b>Words per Minute</b>	<b>Accuracy</b>	<b>Middle of Year Level</b>	<b>Words per Minute</b>	<b>Accuracy</b>
<b>Dan</b>	L	86	100%	O	68	99%
<b>Nick</b>	N	81	97%	O	94	96%
<b>Oscar</b>	M	72	98%	Q	72	95%
<b>Holly</b>	N	39	96%	N	49	97%
<b>Drake</b>	N	96	96%	O	75	95%
<b>Joey</b>	N	88	100%	O	42	98%
<b>Ricardo</b>	M	96	96%	P	51	97%
<b>Heather</b>	N	70	99%	O	49	96%
<b>Kate</b>	N	95	96%	P	62	93%
<b>Mallory</b>	O	51	94%	Q	67	97%
<b>Samantha</b>	N	103	99%	Q	86	97%
<b>Andrew</b>	N	102	99%	P	83	97%
<b>Colby</b>	P	59	98%	Q	90	98%
<b>Keith</b>	M	95	98%	N	100	97%
<b>Ashlynn</b>	P	52	98%	R	79	97%
<b>Elizabeth</b>	O	57	96%	P	69	96%
<b>Molly</b>	M	58	98%	N	73	98%

Note. Beginning of year proficient is P at 90-125 words per minute. Middle of year proficient is R at 105-145 words per minute



### **Reading Attitude Survey Analysis**

The reading attitude survey was based on a maximum score of four for each question. Four indicated that a student felt the best about the question, while one indicated the student felt the worst about the question. The reading attitudes of my students did improve overall (table 5.3). Some areas showed more growth than others, however, I was pleased with the outcome. The remarkable changes were students attitudes about starting a new book had improved, students were more favorable about reading instead of playing, students had a more positive attitude about reading and reading time during school, and students had a more positive attitude about learning from a book. Overall, these results indicate my students were beginning to feel better about reading. At the beginning of the study the average reading attitude was 2.58 out of 4, and at the end of the study their average attitude had increased to 2.93 out of 4. . For a struggling reader, this was half of the battle.

**Negative case analysis.** The only area my students did not show improvement in was reading subject area books. For struggling readers, these books are often too difficult for them to read and as a result, my students do not enjoy reading them

**Table 5.4. Elementary Reading Attitude Survey**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Pre-study Attitude</b>	<b>Post-study Attitude</b>
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<b>How do you feel when you read a book on a rainy Saturday?</b>	2.69	2.87
<b>How do you feel when you read a book in school during free time?</b>	3.38	3.4
<b>How do you feel about reading for fun at home?</b>	2.62	2.93
<b>How do you feel about getting a book for a present?</b>	2.69	3.00
<b>How do you feel about spending free time reading a book?</b>	2.88	3.07
<b>How do you feel about starting a new book?</b>	3.38	3.73
<b>How do you feel about reading during summer vacation?</b>	2.56	2.53
<b>How do you feel about reading instead of playing?</b>	1.25	2.00
<b>How do you feel about going to a bookstore?</b>	3.31	3.53
<b>How do you feel about reading different kinds of books?</b>	3.13	3.4
<b>How do you feel when a teacher asks you questions about what you read?</b>	2.5	2.67
<b>How do you feel about reading workbook pages and worksheets?</b>	1.53	1.93
<b>How do you feel about reading in school?</b>	2.75	2.75

<b>How do you feel about reading your school books?</b>	2.88	3.6
<b>How do you feel about learning from a book?</b>	2.63	2.53
<b>How do you feel when it's time for reading in class?</b>	2.75	3.33
<b>How do you feel about stories you reading in reading class?</b>	2.81	3.2
<b>How do you feel when you read out loud in class?</b>	2.75	3.00
<b>How do you feel about using a dictionary?</b>	1.88	2.93
<b>How do you feel about taking a reading test?</b>	1.25	2.2
<b>Average Attitude</b>	2.58	2.93

Note. The higher number indicates a better attitude about reading.

### **Student Interview Analysis**

Analyzing my students' interviews gave me a better picture of who my students were as readers. They shared their true feeling of how they felt about reading and the type of reading life they had, if any. The pre-interviews helped me to build a library for my students, find out what motivated them to read, and hear their opinion about themselves as readers. As a result of the pre-interviews, I

realized I had to start by building their confidence and self-esteem before I could expect them to get excited about reading a book.

The post-interviews revealed my students had begun to like reading and felt better about themselves as readers. It is wonderful to see my students actually excited about reading a book. They are even planning ahead to the next book they want to read.

### **Post Study Analysis**

**Field log analysis.** Throughout my student, I kept a field log. This is where I recorded observations, reactions, and my reflections. My field log was set up like a double entry journal in chronological order. On the left, I wrote the observations I made with each group of students. On the right, at the end of the day, I analyzed what I saw and planned for future lessons. The field log also included methods, student work, survey and interview data, and assessments. In order to analyze the field log, I completed the following: Reflective Memos, Tally Sheets, Charts, Graphs, a Mid-Study Memo, and Coding.

Each day, I recorded student behaviors, miscues, strengths and weaknesses, and the skills we were practicing. At the end of the day, I sat and reflected on what I had written. I learned so much about how my student thought when they were reading. From writing and decoding words to coding passages in a leveled reader, I could see where my students needed to be instructed. This reflection process has now become a daily part of my teaching. It helps me plan

my instruction, give examples when they are needed for the RtII team, parents and administrators, and allows me to see the growth of my students over a period of time. The thoughtful planning has helped my students grow considerably in their reading.

**Codes and bins.** After my mid study memo was complete, I began to code my data. Color coding the data allowed me to see the similarities and differences among my data. Once the data was coded, I placed like items in bins for analysis. Items that were important to my study remained, while items that were not were discarded or moved to another bin. Once the bins were confirmed, I was able to analyze the bins and search for connections. Below is the analysis of the bins.

**Phonics bin.** Students who had difficulty with decoding typically had difficulty with encoding. I found that students did not write what they heard. On a dry erase board or magnet board, they recorded their thinking. Using metacognition and multisensory activities, I was able to get my students to tap out what they wrote and compare it to what they heard. Then they had to ask themselves, *Did what I wrote match what I tapped? Does the word sound like what I heard?* If not, try to find the sound that does not match. *What other letters could I try to get that sound? What spelling looks familiar?* Then I had my students do the reciprocal and sound out what they read. First they selected a leveled reader for the week on their independent reading level. Then they circled

all of the words they did not know. Next, I had the students try to sound out each word by marking it and tapping out the word. Then students used metacognition to finish the task. *Did the word they tapped out sound familiar? Did it fit in the sentence? Did it make sense?* The phonics with metacognition began to bridge over to comprehension of what was being read in the leveled reader. The use of metacognition with phonics skills in authentic literature connects the students understanding of the sounds to the word.

***Metacognition bin.*** I found my struggling readers did not use metacognition when they were reading. In order to explicitly teach this, I used think alouds and modeling. Through modeling and guided practice my students learned how to think before, during and after reading. One area that was difficult for my students was self-monitoring. They did not stop at the end of the paragraph or page and ask themselves questions. *Do I remember what I just read? What is the story about?* Students practiced strategies like rereading, writing their thoughts in the margins, visualizing, and asking questions right in their books during reading. I also modeled what my inner voice was telling me when I read. These skills could be taught to older struggling readers when the books were on their independent reading levels. Metacognition is the bridge connecting phonics and comprehension.

***Comprehension bin.*** Metacognition carried over into comprehension when my students had to think about what they were reading, react to what they

were reading, and read with a question in mind. Typically, struggling readers do not have opportunities to practice comprehension strategies because what they are reading is too difficult to decode. It is exhausting and frustrating for the struggling readers. However, if students are reading on their independent reading level, they can practice comprehension strategies because all of their energy is not focused on decoding. Using leveled readers and authentic literature, my students were able to make connections, visualize, and ask questions. More importantly, I was able to coach them to determine importance, summarize and draw conclusions. This leads me to my next bin, "In the Zone."

***In the zone bin.*** By differentiating my students' reading levels, I was able to meet them where they were in their reading development. Students had individualized sight words to practice, individualized word work, leveled readers to practice skills and authentic literature to read. Using Bloom's stages of thinking, I can pinpoint where my students are in their development of thinking and stretch them to the next level. The five finger rule for selecting a just right book has helped tremendously. My students would come back from the library with books that were too difficult to read. The five finger rule, after repeated practice, taught them how to find a "Just Right" book. This eliminated frustration and feelings of inadequacy, and motivated my students to actually want to read. This leads me to my next bin.

***Motivation bin.*** Getting struggling readers to want to read is not an easy task. Meeting students where they are in their reading development is the first of many steps in the right direction. Rewards only work if the goals are attainable. Once an independent reading level is established and a plan for intervention is in place, then families need to get involved. Children do not stop learning when they leave school. Students who have parents involved and helping them at home are the students who excel. Motivation can come in many forms, a favorite book, rewards, student choice, and my newest discovery, Therapy Dogs. Each trimester, my students earn stickers for reading at home. In November, my students saved their stickers to cash in to read to the therapy dogs. I had students who never read at home reading and participating in class. They were so excited about reading to the dogs. Another highly motivating activity, which crosses over into the fluency bin, was Reader's Theater. After students learned two syllable types and were assessed for understanding, I had them select a play to perform on stage with their group. Props from former plays were behind the scenes to borrow, which was even more exciting for my students. I took pictures and made videos of each of their plays. I had students who could not read fluently delivering lines and wanting to join the play in middle school by the time they were finished. It was amazing! This flows right into my next bin, "Now Presenting Fluency."



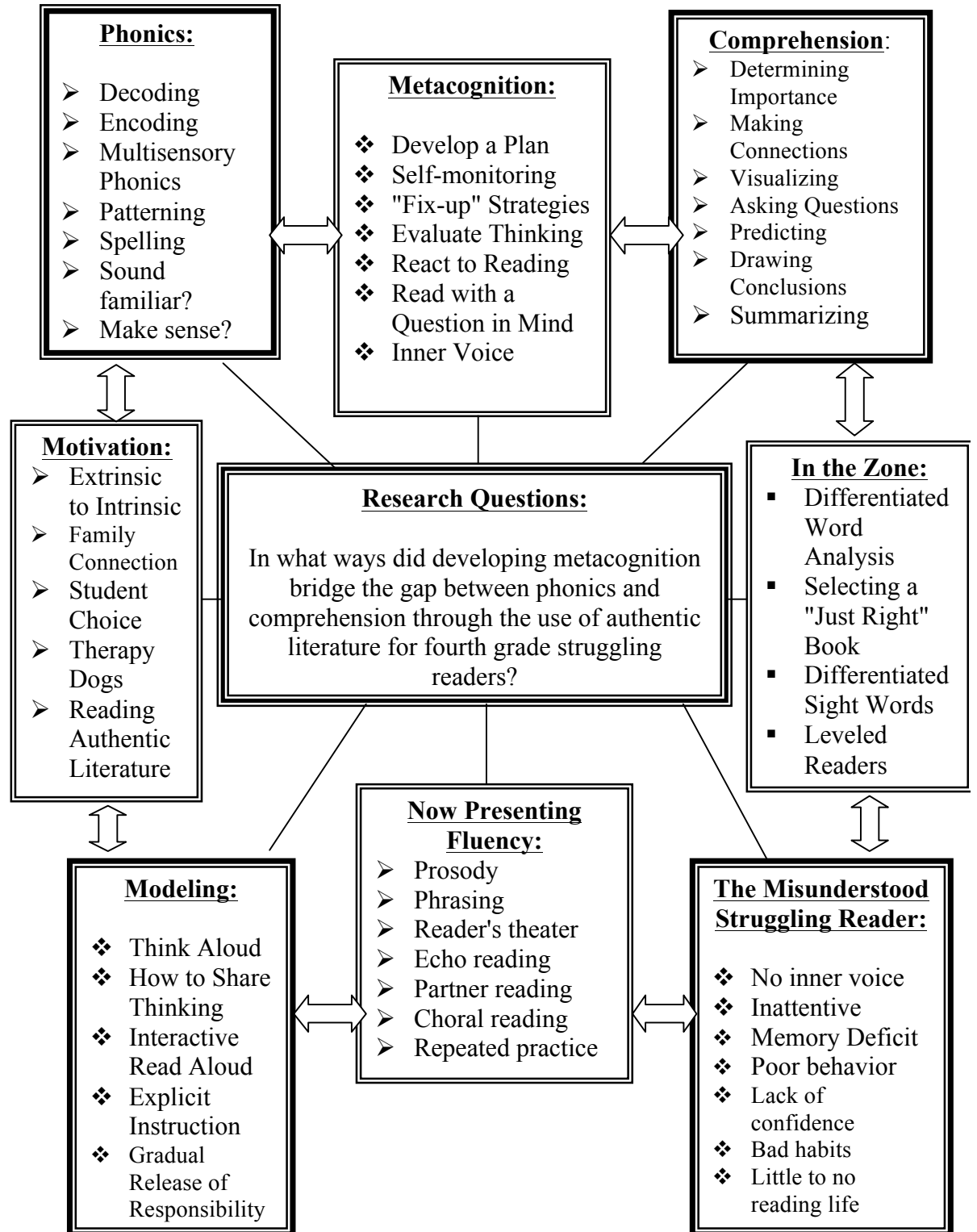
***Now Presenting Fluency bin.*** If you tell a struggling reader "Today we're going to learn about fluency" you have lost them before you have even started. One of the best ways to get students to practice fluency without them ever realizing it is through Reader's Theater. The plays are leveled so they meet students where they are. The students select the play, so it is motivating. It is multisensory, so students who have difficulty learning in a traditional classroom have more freedom to move around. From a fluency aspect, students are using repeated reading to practice phrasing, intonation, expression, rate and accuracy. I modeled how to act out parts, phrase, use expression and intonation and then they practiced. They also learned about team work, which was an added bonus. My students wanted to know when they could do another play after they finished the first one. Modeling played an important part in improving fluency during Reader's Theater.

***Modeling bin.*** Modeling was used throughout my study. Struggling readers need to see first-hand how to think when reading, what strategies to use when decoding, how to select a book that is "Just Right, and hear what good readers sound like. Through modeling and explicit instruction, my students were able to copy and learn what good readers do. One day one of the students asked if he could do a read aloud, like I usually do. He was so excited about reading his book. It was precious. He copied what I did when I read a book to the class. He held the book up and showed the pictures, read with expression, asked questions,

answered questions while reading a book on his level. I was in awe watching him. It made me realize the power of a read aloud by the impression it left on this struggling reader.

***The misunderstood struggling reader bin.*** Struggling readers are quiet and shy, loud and obnoxious, timid and nervous and screaming for help. Their behavior is their survival mechanism. Once I was able to sort through their behaviors, I was able to address the root of the problem, reading. Struggling readers have little to no reading life, have developed bad habits to compensate for deficiencies in reading, have difficulty remembering how to read and what to read, and are often inattentive. By meeting my students where they are in their reading development, I was able to break down the defense walls they had built around themselves to hide their difficulty with reading. This leads me back to where I began. Metacognition did bridge phonics and comprehension when using authentic literature but it also created many new questions to answer.

# Coding Graphic Organizer



## Figure 5.5.

### Chapter 6: Theme Statements

#### Introduction

At the beginning of my study, after my own personal great debate and examination of my students' strengths and weaknesses, I was left wondering: *What are the observed behaviors and reported experiences of fourth grade struggling readers when they develop metacognition to bridge phonics and comprehension through the use of authentic literature?* By the end of my study, I found answers to my question, however, these answers created more questions. I discovered my students were hard working, eager to learn, and in desperate need of a meaningful reading intervention. Through my story, I was able to share their successes and failures on their journey to becoming life-long readers. It also became apparent to me how important it was to meet my students where they were in their reading development and to motivate them. From my coding and bins, I was able to dig deeper and create the following themes or hypothesis for future research to strengthen my understanding of how to help older struggling readers (Figure 5.1).

**When students were provided with an opportunity to develop metacognition and apply phonetic skills, practical word attack strategies were developed and carried over to every day reading.**

Prior to students entering the reading intervention program at the beginning of the year, one of the criteria to be in the program was a strategic or intensive score on the CORE Phonics Survey. This survey indicated a deficit in phonics. Even though my students had been previously taught phonics skills in the lower grades, they did not remember and apply these skills when they read larger multisyllabic words. It seemed that using a multisensory phonics approach to learn how to decode, sound out, and encode a word, or spell, has helped struggling readers retain the skills (Campbell, 2008).

Metacognition appeared to occur when students had to tap out the word they wrote and not tap out what they heard. Some struggling readers tend not to write the spoken sounds but a sound they think they hear. This multisensory component of my study seemed to help struggling students realize where their encoding broke down. Once the students were aware of their mistake, they continued using the tapping to check their work. Finally, when students asked themselves, "Did what I just read sound familiar? Did the word make sense?" students were able to catch where their miscues occurred and began to monitor their own reading (Gaskins, 1988).

**The process of metacognition needs to be modeled and practiced because it is not a skill that students know how to do innately.**

Struggling readers tend to be very literal. They need to be taught how to think deeply. Struggling readers tend to lack a plan for reading. Setting

individual goals for each of my students was critical in helping them move forward from where they began in September. They need to use their inner voice and self-monitor during reading to ensure understanding of what is read. Students also need to read with a question in mind and react to their reading while they are reading. It can be verbal, on sticky notes or even written directly in the text. My study has provided evidence that metacognition can be taught; however more evidence is needed. With scaffolding and modeling, I was able to get my students to make their thinking visible through coding. They were able to show evidence of self-monitoring, using "Fix-up" strategies, evaluating their thinking, reacting to their reading, and reading with a question in mind.

**When students monitor and clarify, make connections, visualize, ask questions, predict, infer and summarize during reading, they create deeper meaning and understanding of the text. The development of metacognition with comprehension is critical to a student's understanding of the text.**

Simply knowing how to make connections, visualize, ask questions, predict or summarize does not guarantee metacognition is taking place. In other words, learning comprehension skills in isolation and without metacognition will not ensure success in understanding what is read. In my study, students demonstrated making connections, visualizing, asking questions, predicting, drawing conclusions and summarizing. They used these skills within authentic literature to make it more meaningful.

**It is pertinent to meet my students where they are to stretch within their zone of proximal development through explicit instruction, modeling, and scaffolding, and practice.**

Vygotsky (1978) found the following:

The zone of proximal development defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in the embryonic state. These functions could be termed the "bud" or "flower" of development rather than the "fruits" of development." (p. 86)

In other words, with scaffolding, students would be capable of learning the concept being taught. Many students in fourth grade score at a third grade reading level. Because there is teacher support and scaffolding, the students can be taught reading at a fourth grade level. This is similar to a child's independent reading level versus his instructional reading level. His instructional reading level is usually a year higher than his independent reading level. A frustration level would be out of the child's zone of proximal development.

Teachers need to assess their students to determine their independent and instructional reading levels. Once this is established, an instructional plan needs to be developed around their zone of proximal development. One size does not fit all, so it is critical to meet students where they are in their development. It is also

important to provide them with opportunities for success to motivate them to continue to move forward.

Another way to meet students in their zone of learning is with the tools to select a "Just Right" book. This tool is a quick way for students to tell if a book is too easy, too hard or "Just Right". Even when book levels are available, this is a great backup to try because leveling systems can vary.

**Older struggling readers can be encouraged to read through the use of highly motivational activities including student selected authentic literature on their reading level, therapy dogs, and Reader's Theater. Getting parents involved is also a key to motivation. Rewards need to shift from extrinsic to intrinsic while fostering the love for reading.**

Freire (2000) found the following:

True generosity consists precisely in fighting to destroy the causes which nourish false charity. False charity constrains the fearful and subdued, the "reject of life," to extend their trembling hands. True generosity lies in the striving so that these hands- whether of individuals or entire peoples- need be extended less and less in supplication, so that more and more they become human hands which work and, working, transforms the world. (p.45)

As educators, we need to reflect upon the assistance we offer our students and their parents. We want to lift them up and not keep them in their place, as



society often does. They need to feel a sense of accomplishment and pride, not feel ashamed. If generosity is given with expectation of work, then families will have a better chance of breaking the cycle of oppression. Educators need to constantly remind themselves of their role and not to become oppressors.

One of my most important roles as an educator is to provide my parents with a support system so they can help their children at home. All parents find out rather quickly that children do not come with an instruction manual. The home/school connection is critical and provides the parents with the opportunity to get involved. Parents need to play an active role in their child's education.

Freire has taught me the importance of pride. If I do not communicate effectively with my parents, then they may be insulted or offended by my actions. Positive parent communication with just the right amount of support is essential to the success of my Title I program and breaking the cycle of oppression.

Motivation is also critical in helping struggling readers to become successful. It should shift from extrinsic to intrinsic over time as their confidence begins to grow and reading becomes a habit. Getting families involved and offering students choices in the books they read are two areas of importance. Activities like Reader's Theater, therapy dogs, and Family Literacy Nights are all motivational to the students.

**When students are provided with modeling and taught how independent readers think, their reading improves. It is critical to develop metacognition so students can use their thinking to decode and read with comprehension, before, during and after reading.**

Working with older struggling readers made developing metacognition an intricate part of their intervention. By fourth grade students are developmentally ready to think about their thinking. The best way to teach metacognition is by modeling our thinking and providing our students with explicit instruction.

By modeling questioning, visualizing, and synthesizing information, for example, I was able to teach my students how to think. For struggling readers, scaffolding is a must; however the process can be learned.

Interactive read-alouds are a great way to model various types of word attack strategies and comprehension skills. Modeling my thinking before, during and after reading helped my students hear what good readers do when they are reading. During the study, I modeled my thinking and then with guided practice, the students modeled their thinking. Whether it was a phonics or comprehension strategy, it was modeled and then practiced. Once I had evidence my students understood what to do, I had them practice independently. At the end of each class, the students shared their thinking, which allowed my students to hear other ways to think about their reading. Students demonstrated their thinking through

coding and discussions. Think alouds work well with gradual release of responsibility.

Explicit instruction is also critical to a reading program designed to help struggling readers. In fact, it should be daily practices in all reading classrooms. Explicitly teaching a skill through a mini lesson, providing guided practice and then independent practice increases the students' understanding what they are reading.

**Student fluency with prosody increases when students are provided with multisensory activities to engage in, such as, Reader's Theater, echo reading, partner reading, choral reading and repeated practice.**

Fluency is often the most misrepresented component of reading. Having students read as fast as they can to a timer without regard to meaning is not fluency. Fluency is also prosody, including phrasing, intonation, and expression. These are important because they represent the student's understanding of the words he or she read. Meaningful fluency can be improved through Reader's Theater, Echo reading, partner reading, choral reading, and repeated practice.

"Children can imitate a variety of actions that go well beyond the limits of their own capabilities. Using imitation, children are capable of doing much more in collective activity or under the guidance of adults (Vygotsky, 1978, p.88).

What I believe Vygotsky is saying is if we can get our students to imitate our thinking they would be able to do more than they would be able to do

independently. Hearing how good readers read, and then practicing with good readers is one way to ensure meaningful fluency. My students learned to become more fluent readers by imitating their parents or I when they echo read. This has been proven effective by the works of Timothy Rasinski (2009).

**The misunderstood struggling reader is either too busy trying to decode what is being read, or has no recollection of what was read. His/her mind tends to wander, making it difficult to remember where they were or what they were reading. As a result they either lack confidence or become a behavior problem. In reality, the struggling reader selects books that are too difficult to decode and he/she gives up. The vicious cycle begins with each new book selection without intervention and the student continues to have little to no reading life.**

Library day for most struggling readers is not a favorite. The cycle begins with selecting a book that is too difficult, but it is what their friends are reading. The student wants to fit in and look like everyone else. After the student reads a page or two, meaning breaks down and the student becomes frustrated. It usually ends with the student feeling inadequate as a reader and the book is tossed in the proverbial mountain of unread books. The next week when library time rolls around, the book is returned and another failed attempt at reading is mentally noted. As library begins, so does another vicious cycle of reading failure.

Often, struggling readers do not have an inner voice to talk them through a book. They often appear inattentive because they are not connecting with the text without this inner voice. Often the text is too difficult for them to read.

Some struggling readers have difficulty with remembering how to decode or what they have read. Often this is a result of a deficit in the short term, phonological or working memory. These terms are used interchangeably in research. This is why the use of a multisensory approach is needed. The multisensory activities helped my students transfer the skills from the short term to the long term memory. I found the finger tapping, syllable divides and encoding to be the most beneficial.

Some struggling readers develop poor behavior as a result of repeated failures. Their behavior is a cover up for their poor reading. They do not want to look inadequate in front of their peers, so they cover it by pretending not to care and acting too cool for school. Breaking down the walls that surround these readers is challenging and difficult. In the end though, it is very rewarding.

Sadly, many struggling readers do not have a reading life. Their parents do not read, nor do they encourage reading. Without good role models, struggling readers fall into the same oppression as their parents.

Freire's ideas and philosophy of education, although written in the 1970's, are similar to the expectations of 21st century learners today. Problem-based learning is one of the key ingredients to prepare students for the work force.

Patrick J. Finn, author of *Literacy with an Attitude* wrote of oppression in schools and how it affects the different classes of students. Freire's chapters one and two reminded me of Finn's book. When you think about the complexity of the whole social infrastructure, which has existed for hundreds of years, and how it can trap people into oppression, it is a miracle that anyone is ever able to break free from oppression.

To help my struggling readers break free from the oppression holding them back, I provided my students with the opportunity to choose and read books on their level. It was important for me to model what good readers do and remind my students learning anything in life requires practice. Most importantly, I taught my students the value of work ethic, perseverance, and pride through my own actions. I explained to them at the beginning of the study that I too had been a struggling reader and I did not allow that to stop me from becoming successful.

## Next Steps

"Collateral learning in the way of formation of enduring attitudes , of likes and dislikes, may be and often is much more important than the spelling lesson or lesson in geography or history that is learned" (Dewey, p. 48).

As educators, we need to take a step back and reflect on the attitudes our students have about what they are learning in school. Without reflecting on our students' thoughts and needs, we could end up discouraging them from liking school or the subject being taught. Students have voices and we need to listen to them. This will propel them forward into the stage of lifelong learner.

In the future, I plan to dig deeper into the themes I have created and try to have a better understanding of how to help older struggling readers. The one area my students did not show growth was in reading subject area books. This definitely needs to be studied as research in the future. Use of mentor texts, news articles and internet sources to improve the students' views on reading subject area books would be the purpose of my research. Too much emphasis is placed on outdated subject area books and not enough on authentic literature in the subject area.

A second area I would like to investigate is Bloom's Stages of Thinking. I noticed during my study that my students were beginning to fall into a certain stages of thinking. I was able to pinpoint where my students were in their

thinking development, but did not collect data on what I observed toward the end of my study. I would like to create a study using Bloom's Stages of Thinking and see if I can stretch my students to the next stage of thinking without overwhelming them.

One area I would like to research further is Therapy Dogs. They were highly motivational in my study for my students. Very little research exists in the area of therapy dogs being used to motivate reluctant readers even though this practice has become quite common.

Finally, I would like to develop a tool to measure the developmental growth of metacognition to use with this program. The data I collected was in the form of student written response, tally charts, self-reflection and teacher anecdotal notes; however, I would like to collect quantitative data as well.

Most importantly I will continue working with struggling readers to help them close the gap in their reading and develop a reading life. Teaching reading and writing is a passion that I want to continue to share with my students and parents.



## **Resources**

Columbia University's Teacher's College Reading and Writing Project

Reading A to Z.com

Wilson Reading: Just Words

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